

TRAIL BIKES

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WPS

TESTS

HONDA • YAMAHA • SUZUKI
KAWASAKI • HUSQVARNA

HOW TO:

BUILD A TOOL KIT • EASY TIRE CHANGES
RIDING GEAR - MAKE IT LAST

**PRO
RIDING**
and
MAINTENANCE
TIPS



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PUBLISHER & EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
George Elliott

SPECIALTY PUBLICATIONS DIRECTOR
Dean Batchelor

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Mark Anderson
Brock Goss
Kevin Hagerty
Bud Lammers
Denise Letellier
Ted Lytle
Brad Zimmerman

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The little bike that could



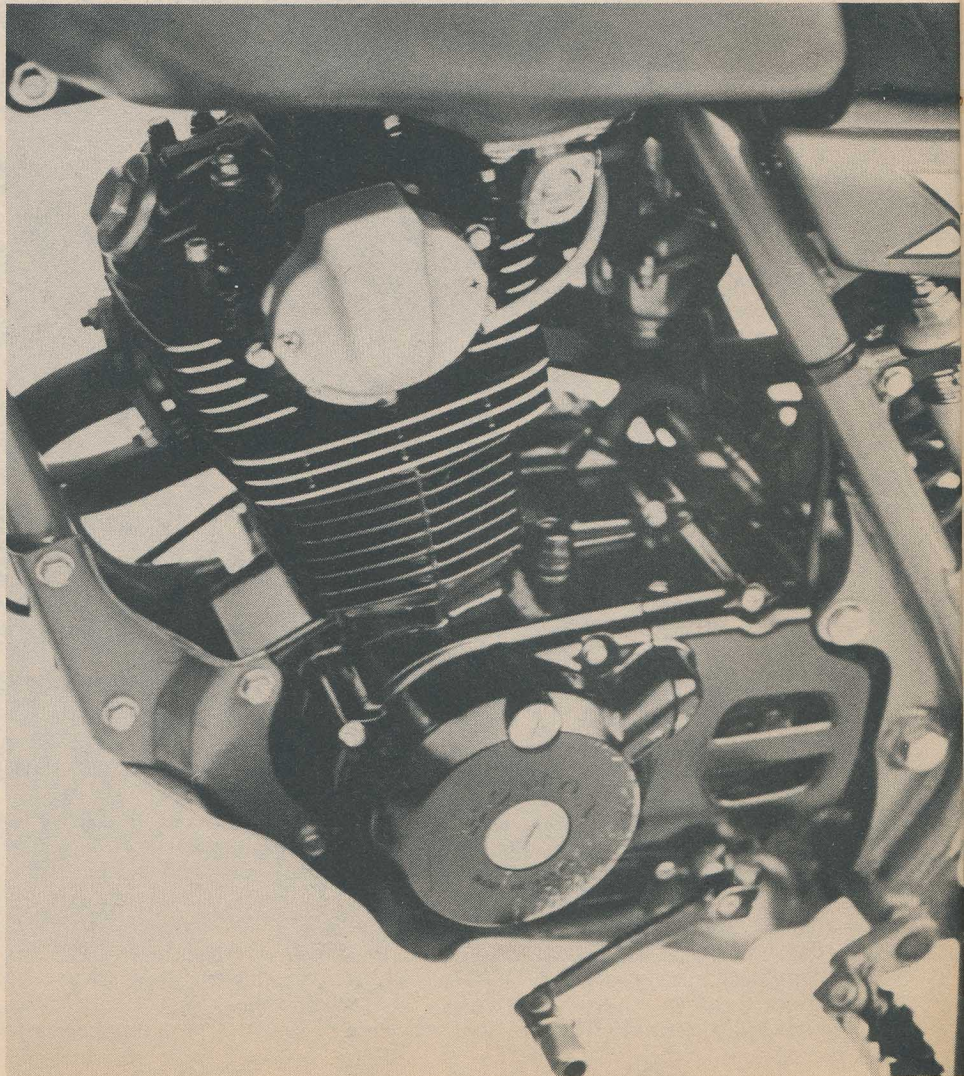
HONDA XR200R

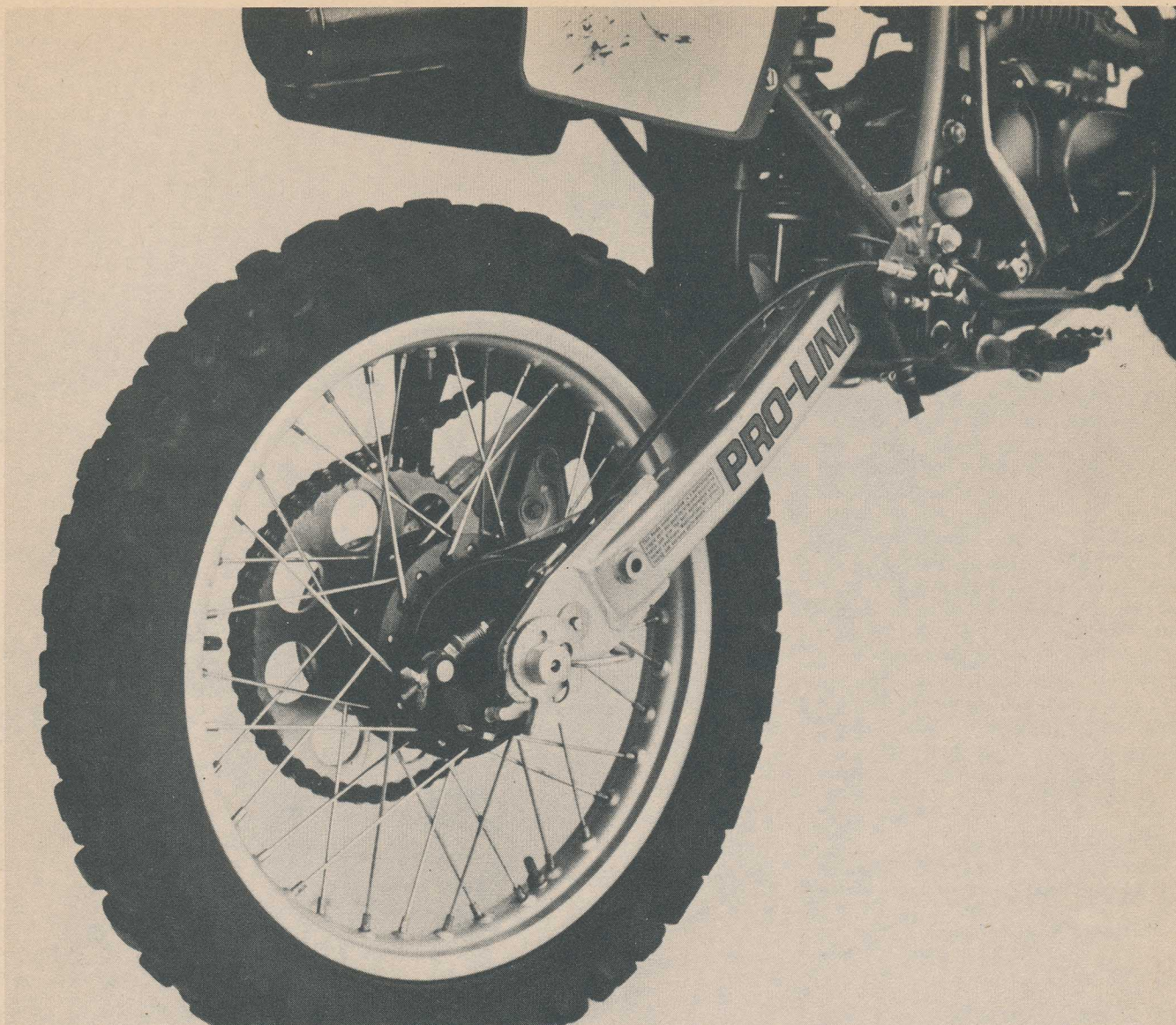
To tell you the truth we weren't really smacking our lips in anticipation of the Honda XR200R that we were going to use as one of our test bikes in this issue. We ordered it along with one of the bigger XRs which, because of time problems, wasn't available. We got the XR200R on time—and it ended up being the bike in this issue that got the hardest workout. It was crashed, thrashed and by far beaten the hardest, and of all the bikes we've been riding in the last six months, got the most respect from our riders.

It isn't because the XR200R is the lightest or fastest or best bike. It's not any of those things. It's not a bike that you would seriously campaign if you were out to shoot down the fast guys in the 200cc class. It just ain't gonna happen.

If the Honda XR200R isn't any of those things, what then is it? Probably

Even though it doesn't have the high RPM range of a two-stroke, the little 200cc four-stroke engine pumps out a lot of ponies. It's extra torque allows you to ride up some very steep hills—and go over the top.





The brake hubs and brake shoe areas are very small, but manage to stop the bike extremely well. The snail cam adjusters on the swingarm make chain adjustment quick and easy.

one of the most versatile and popular off-road bikes of recent years—and justifiably so. Just look at the overall package. It starts with an absolutely bulletproof and never-die 200cc four stroke engine. All you have to do is put gas in the tank, keep on top of the oil in the gearbox, clean the filter once in a while, and treat it to a yearly spark plug. That's about it. The engine more or less takes care of itself.

There isn't a whole lot of maintenance involved in a motorcycle frame—especially this one. We ended up taking the XR200R into situations and riding conditions that would make the design engineers cringe if they ever found out. The group of guys who sketched out the beginnings of this little Honda didn't plan to have maniacs like us leaping off stadium-type jumps, repeatedly bottoming out the suspension, slamming the frame into the ground and totally tax the stress and strength capabilities

of the bike. But that's what we did with the XR200R, and despite all the disrespect and demands put on it by our group of bike testers, it's none the worse for wear.

Matter of fact we've got to admit that the treatment our XR200R Honda got during its testing period was a bit on the harsh side. You could never accuse us of going easy on the bike. We even established a pattern that the poor XR200R had to accommodate each time we took it out.

Generally those who hadn't previously ridden the XR200R would scoff at the bike, pointing out the extremely short wheelbase, the spindly looking little front forks, the obviously underpowered engine, and tiny spokes. Invariably, by the end of the day, those same guys were saying "Give me that thing. I don't believe it works that good. I've got to try this myself."

Here's the bottom line on the XR200R. If it were your grandmother

going trail riding, the little XR could easily handle her for the whole day without once unjustifiably throwing her on the ground. It can be an incredibly mild motorcycle to ride. The power doesn't blast you off the seat. The handling isn't something that requires knowing "the secrets" to get cooperation. It stops quicker than it goes—grams wouldn't overshoot many corners on this baby.

Then again, hand the same XR200R to her 16 year old grandson, point him at a mountain trail, and he'll be clutch fanning, gearbox rowing, and leaping his way around all day—on one tank of gas, we might add.

The XR200R, despite its short wheelbase, despite the fact that it looks like it should be a play bike, is actually a very good handling, high performing enduro machine. Don't get us wrong—it's not the top of the class. If you're an A class rider, you're going to have to work very hard for

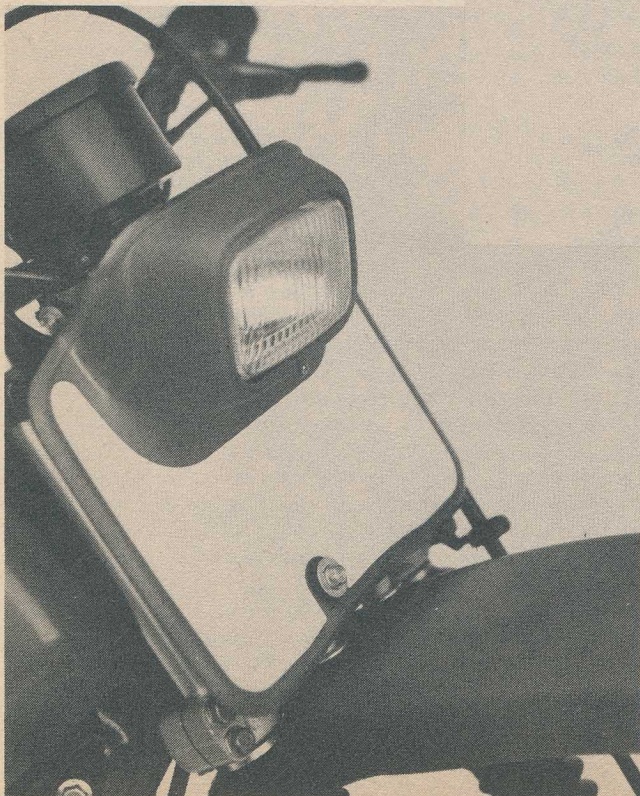
that class win trophy. In most cases the XR200R gets smoked by the abundance of Yamaha IT175, Kawasaki KDX 175s, Suzuki 175 Floaters and the often evident European 175cc machines.

But if you're going trail riding, and want to ride an occasional enduro, or you're looking for a good mannered, reliable motorcycle that will help you get into riding, the XR200R might be just the thing.

We've always shied away from extremely short motorcycles, especially because a lot of our riding is done in high speed desert surroundings. Short wheelbase motorcycles have this terrible habit that has been proven to be hazardous to your health. On occasion a short bike will, with very little prompting, do a 90 degree hop sideways. This, to say the least, really gets your attention when you've got the throttled whacked wide open. Since the XR2002 has only a 53-inch wheelbase, we expected to do a couple of side hops on XR200R.

But the combination of a well designed frame and good Pro-Link single shock rear suspension resulted in the fact that our XR200R rarely hopped sideways—at least no more often than any other machine. That

Kayaba forks on the Honda XR200R are capable of handling the demands of riders from the 120 to the 180 pound range. Heavier riders can raise the pressure in the air-assist forks.



Even though it's not meant to be street legal, the headlight throws a surprisingly large beam of light. Honda mounts the headlight above the number plate area to take full advantage of available height.

fact brought up something very interesting about our test XR200R, and shed a little light on why the bike works as well as it does.

Apparently a lot of the side hop isn't just because of a short wheelbase, but the combination of the wheelbase and poor suspension, which prods the bike towards the sideways hops. With the Pro-Link rear shock, even despite the tiny front forks, the suspension on the XR200R is good enough to overpower the bike's tendency to get squirrely. What you end up with is a short bike, capable of going fast over open terrain, that isn't going to throw you into the ground just for giggles.

Another benefit is that short bikes turn better on tight trails. With most dirt bikes, there is a compromise

struck between high speed stability (helped by a longer wheelbase) and tight woods turning (where a short wheelbase is the secret). Most bikes strike a mid-point. By having a medium-length wheelbase, you get stability at high speeds, and fairly good handling on the tight areas. The XR200R, with the ability to do both, not only hangs in there in the fast, but has a distinct advantage in the tight sections.

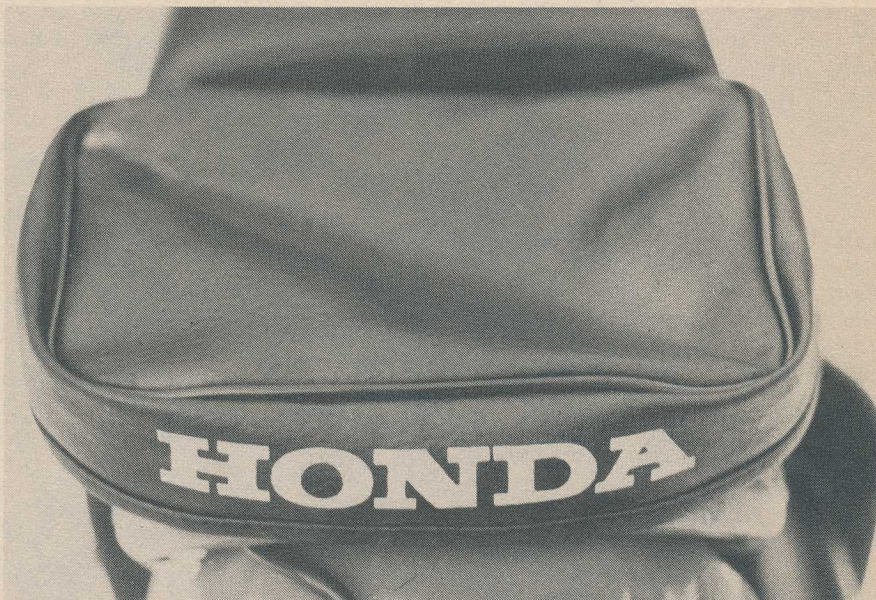
Here's a for instance for you: We took the Kawasaki KDX 175, Husky XC250 and Yamaha IT250 out on a ride, along with the little Honda. On the high horsepower sections the pair of 250s lead, the KDX was just behind, and way in the back would be the Honda.

But when the trails got tight, the pecking order would change. The Yamaha dropped to the back, the KDX and XR200R were battling, and depending on who rode which, either the Honda or the Kawasaki would get the nod for second place. We had one of our riders, farther advanced than any of the others, actually keep the XR200R consistently ahead of the Husky for a 30 mile loop, simply because it handled so well and the trail was so tight that he could compensate for a lack of go power by get-

ting down a trail quickly. Granted, he was a better rider than the rest of us, but he couldn't have kept the lead if the Honda wasn't a cooperative machine.

Since it became a challenge to find the mechanical limits of the XR200R, we did some pretty heavy flogging. One test loop included 20 minutes of madman shifting, big jumps and constant wide open throttle.

The XR200R was very surprising in its abilities to hold up under the punishment, and keep on performing. It has a lot more get up and go than we realized. The older four strokes used to drop very far behind their two stroke counterparts, especially when the going got rough. Not the case with the XR200R. It may have to follow the faster two strokes, but they're not going to shake loose



In previous years these toolbags were only ornamental. Honda has since changed materials and turned it into a useful storage space. Just be careful not to put unprotected screwdrivers in there—they punch holes.



Want to go for a long trailride? The gas tank will give you well over 120 miles of trail riding. The cap opening is wide enough for clumsy pourers.

from the Honda without a good fight. If the trail is tight, and especially if it requires some torque, they're going to be led by the Honda, rather than laugh at it.

You wouldn't think that the little 200cc engine would have enough muscle for most riders. Neither did our 185 pound test rider, but he managed to loop the bike in second gear and break the taillight.

And most riders would cringe at the thought of jumping the XR200 ten feet up into the air. The landing alone would make the rider inches shorter. Yet we put our XR200R through over 200 of these jumps and other than a

little wear and abuse on the wheels that required spoke tightening, you'd never know we'd been consistently catapulting "little red" into the air.

You've heard of the Yellow Submarine. After one exceptionally deep water crossing, one of our test riders dubbed the XR200R the Red Submarine because of its deep diving abilities. At a water crossing that was deep enough to put water right up to the top of the carburetor, our XR200R chugged right on through. The brakes faded after about three passes, but it only took a mile to dry them out.

In all about the only component we could coax into "rolling over" was the

clutch. In some of the steeper climbs, where the rider was frantically and constantly fanning the clutch to get some revs out of the motor, it would heat up and fade after about five minutes of abuse. Most four strokes give up their clutch abilities before two strokes, primarily because they tend to heat up faster and retain the heat longer. We do know that the clutch in the XR250R goes away sooner than the one in the 200R, if it's any consolation.

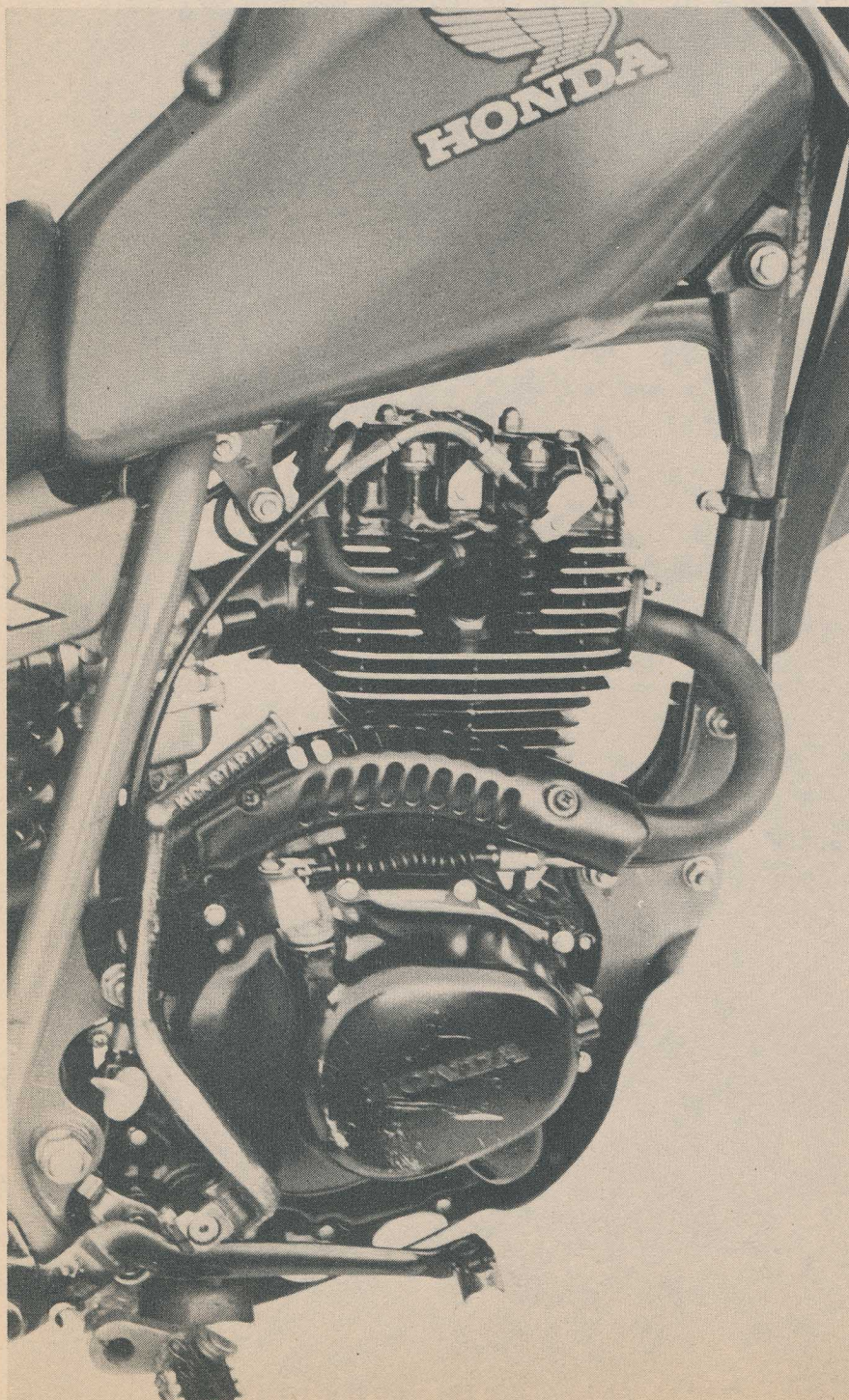
"How long will the shock last? was one of our major questions. When we picked up our test bike, it was no spring chicken. The bike had been ridden before. And, as you've gathered from our test, we didn't cut it any slack either. Yet when we returned the machine to Honda, the shock was working just as well as when we had picked it up—hundreds of miles and hours of abuse later.

One of our test riders, who's known to his friends as "The Human Dyno" more or less prides himself on the fact that he can do things like bend footpegs, handlebars, tweak forks and break gearboxes through an aggressive riding style that's best described as . . . well . . . let's say he gets great pleasure at disproving things like how many G forces a motorcycle takes before the frame folds up—stuff like that. Calls himself a "load limitation pioneer."

The XR200R frustrated him. It looked like easy pickings. He could be heard snickering at the bike when it was loaded up. He made snide remarks during the ride to our play area. He was looking forward to riding the XR200R, because he wanted to add another tweaked two-wheel trophy to his list.

Other than the taillight (yea—same guy), the only thing he can add to his list of growing victories are one set of bars (which were bent by jumping and landing harshly on the ground), and a broken front brake lever (big deal). Other than that good old H.D. saw this little red wagon slip by relatively unscathed. The only other damage done was to the shift lever, which kissed a watermelon size rock in a tight canyon. The shifter hangs way out there. We just beat it back into position.

As we took turns riding the XR200R, it quickly became the "in" thing to consistently remind everyone that you were the one on the little Honda. After each big hill, tight trail or gnarly rock canyon, the XR200R



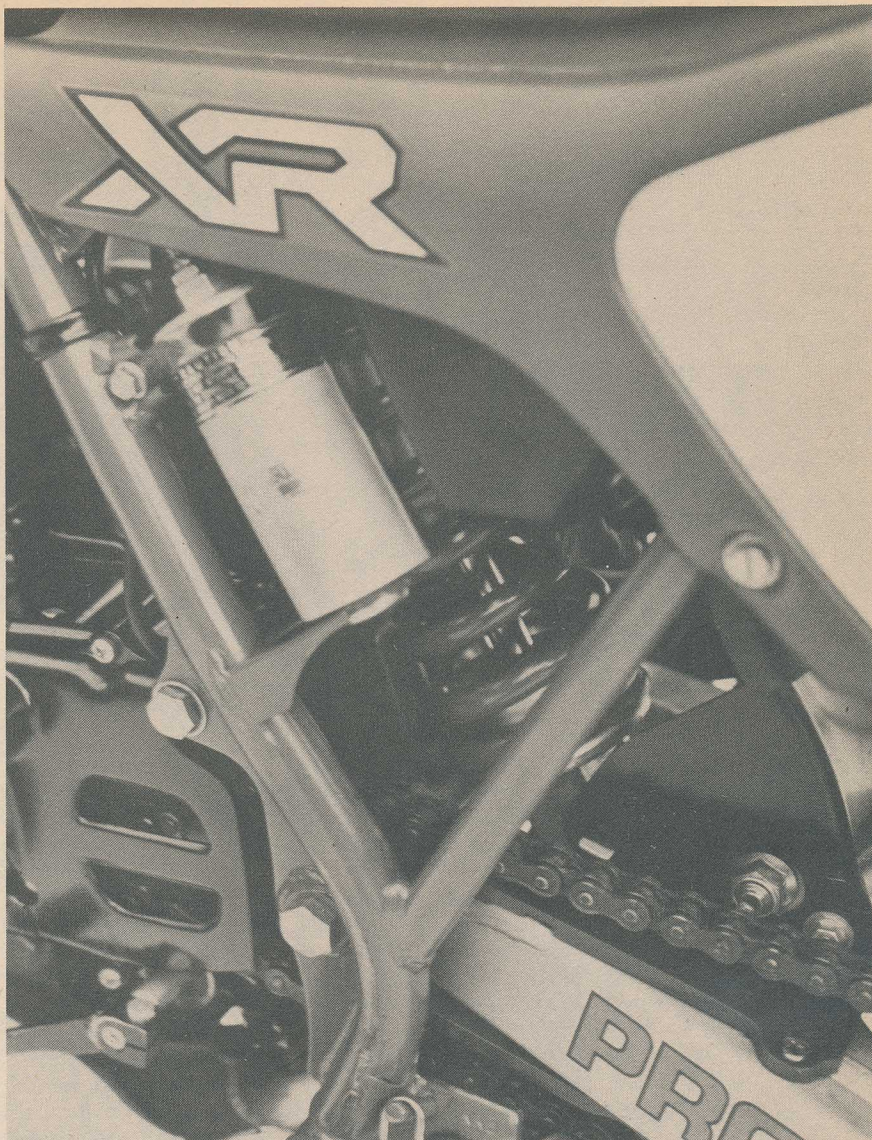
Even though it's a four-stroke engine with lots of parts, the powerplant for the XR200R is very compact. Even the exhaust pipe snakes around the narrow engine to keep the width down.

rider never missed the opportunity to rub everyone else's nose in the fact that he was on the supposed inferior machine. It took us a while to admit that the bike was a much better performer than we had anticipated.

About the only place that the XR200R is really going to let you down is in the long uphill where there isn't ample traction. In sections where there is power robbing sand, loose rocks and dirt, or shale, and the XR200R can't get even a hint of serious traction, you're going to have to jump off, paddle, push and huff your way to the top. It's the only situation where the old story of the too-heavy four stroke engine is most evident. Four strokes have gotten lighter over the years, but there's still improvements to be made in performance areas.

The XR200R has got to be one of the absolute gas misers of all time. You can fill the tank up in the morning and not even think of stopping for gas until mid-afternoon. It will run on just about anything that will burn.

If you're under 170 pounds, and looking for a good reliable motorcycle for trail riding and occasional enduro riding, the Honda XR200R is probably your best bet. It handles great, stops well, has good suspension and more horsepower than you'd expect. As we mentioned, the maintenance time is very low, the bike isn't going to break easily, and it's very cheap to operate. If that's what you're for in a motorcycle, you can't go wrong with the Honda XR200R.



You can see part of the Pro-Link suspension unit. The oil reservoir is in the foreground, while the shock peeks out from behind the airbox area. The shock mounts to the frame below the tank, and to the swingarm at its center position.

This quiet silencer/spark arrester barely pokes out from behind the right side panel. The frame just above the arrester is a good place to grab the bike when pulling it out of "situations."



Engine Type	single cylinder four stroke
Bore and Stroke	65.6mm x 57.8mm
Displacement	195cc
Compression Ratio	7.6:1
Transmission	6-speed
Carburetor	26mm Keihin
Wheelbase	53.3 inches
Seat height	35.0 inches
Ground Clearance	13.4 inches
Front Suspension	air/oil forks, 9.8 inches travel
Rear Suspension	Pro-Link shock, 9.7 inches travel
Gas tank capacity	2.1 gallons
Riding range	approx. 100 miles
Front tire size	3.00 x 21
Rear tire size	4.10 x 18