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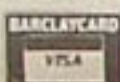
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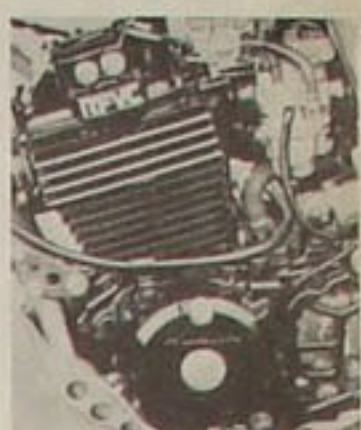
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 XR 250 - XR 350**



The disc brake on both models
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TMX News
BIKE TEST

HONDA XR250, XR350
FRANK MELLING was kindly loaned a Honda XR 250 by Bill Head at Preston for his impressions, while **MIKE RAPLEY** rode the XR 250, XR 350 and Wilf Harvey's MTX 80 in a Honda test session at Blaxhall Pits



The XR 250 RFVC engine, plenty of revs, stacks of torque and nice and easy ride.

XR250 - neat racer to rival petrol mob

OKAY, folks, this is the one you have all been waiting for. At last, a four-stroke enduro bike on which one can nearly race a two-stroke of equal capacity, or to be fair, can probably run right up against the petrol opposition in the right conditions. A four-stroke which at 231lbs dry, is light enough for a mere human to ride in comfort and one which - pause for amazed gasps from readers - can be started when stalled!

In short, the XR250 is the most complete, most competitive four stroke enduro bike ever produced and although not perfect, is the nearest thing to a race-ready class winner so far offered for sale.

Although the engine belongs to the same family as last year's RFVC 350 and 500cc lumps, the con-

cept of the bike is far more in keeping with the XR200. Thus, instead of the man-sized proportions of the big bikes - fine for the parc fermé but not nearly so much fun when the bike is sinking cylinder head deep in a Crychan bog - the 250 is a diminutive little beast just like the 200. In fact, Honda report that the 250 and new 200 (not available in Britain) are identical in every respect other than an 8mm larger bore on the bigger bike.

However, the XR250 has one great advantage over its earlier baby brother - power. Riding the old 200 was always fun but when the hedgehogs sprinted past on shale roads, one was conscious of not having an embarrassment of horsepower. With the 250, the front wheel can be lifted over logs just with a tweak of the throttle, bogs can be jumped with confidence and almost incredibly, the XR will even execute downhill jumps with aplomb. Plus there is now enough power to actually race on the shale roads rather than merely sit there waiting for them to end, as was the case with the 200.

The reason for this vast increase in power - Honda



Frank Melling clears a boggy ditch while testing the 250.

claim 29PS from the new motor - must lie in the high-tech cylinder head. With valves disposed radially round the motor, it is not possible to get a conventional rocker to bear on the valve tip so a supplementary unit is used. This means that eight rockers and a single camshaft are employed to operate the valves.

Two 24mm carburettors

feed the head. The left-hand serves the motor from tick-over to medium revs and the right-hand is for peak rpm. To balance the flow in the induction tracts, a reed valve links the two.

The result is a motor which will really pull strongly - not like a traditional thumper because the 250 is too lightly flywheeled

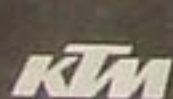
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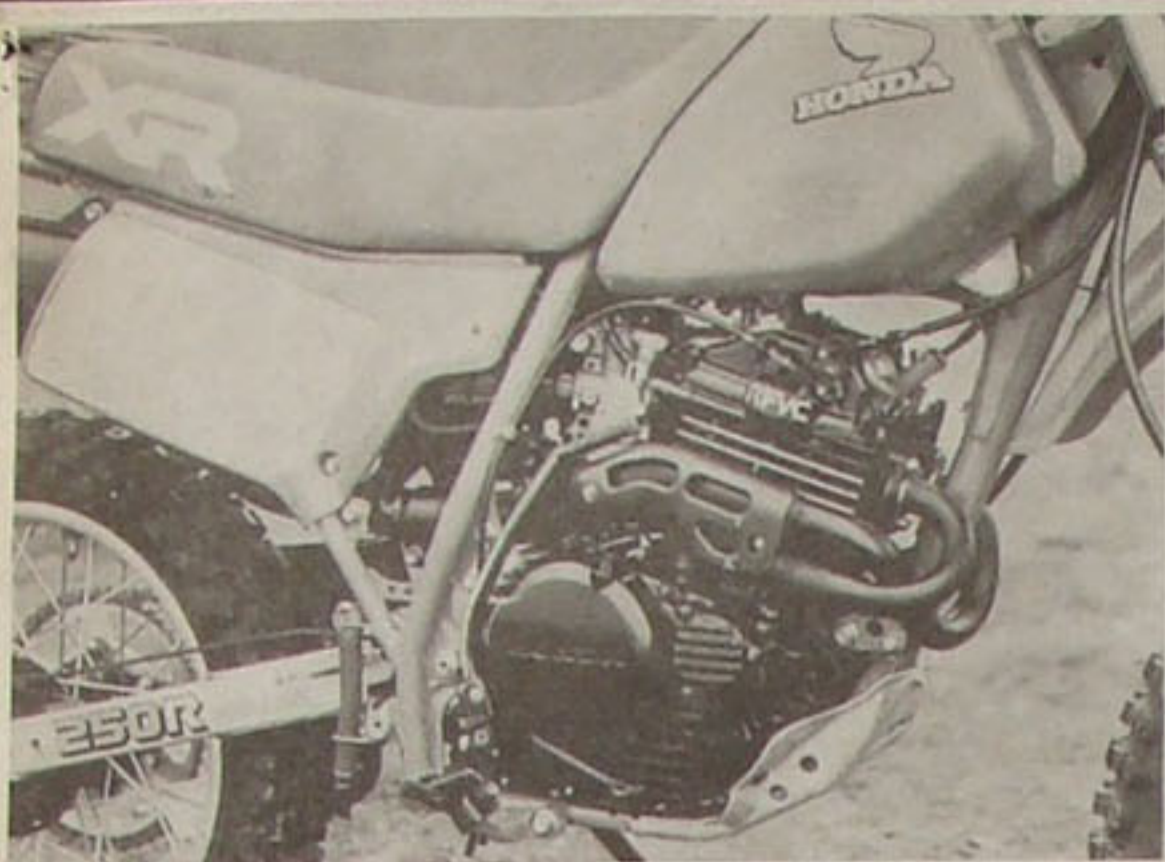
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Here's a rare picture, Rappers on a bike with both wheels off the ground. Worth cutting out and pasting on the wall this one!



Details of the 250. Not the most nook and cranny free bike, and one not as easily looked after as some others. But on the trail she's grand.

— but rather in terms of cam - produced torque. Again, when compared with the 200, the 250 has so much more bottom - end power that one wonders how one ever managed to live without it.

The beauty of the 250 is that it is willing to rev out in a fashion which makes it distinctly different from the 350 and 500 motors. At about 6,000 rpm, it really kicks on to the cam and will then buzz on, simply going faster. By comparison, the 350 makes the right noises but goes slower when it is revved out. Altogether, the 250 is a far better and more pleasant unit than any

other off-road four-stroke I have ridden.

The six speed gearbox is much improved over the 200 and the range of ratios gives a really ultra-low first with a sixth gear which should be good for around 75mph. Changes are very sweet and positive under power, even when not using the clutch, which is just as well since the unit seems to have been copied from a hand exerciser for King Kong. Certainly, the first person to market extended clutch arms will have a guaranteed market.

With a wheelbase of only 53 1/2", the XR will never steer or handle at speed

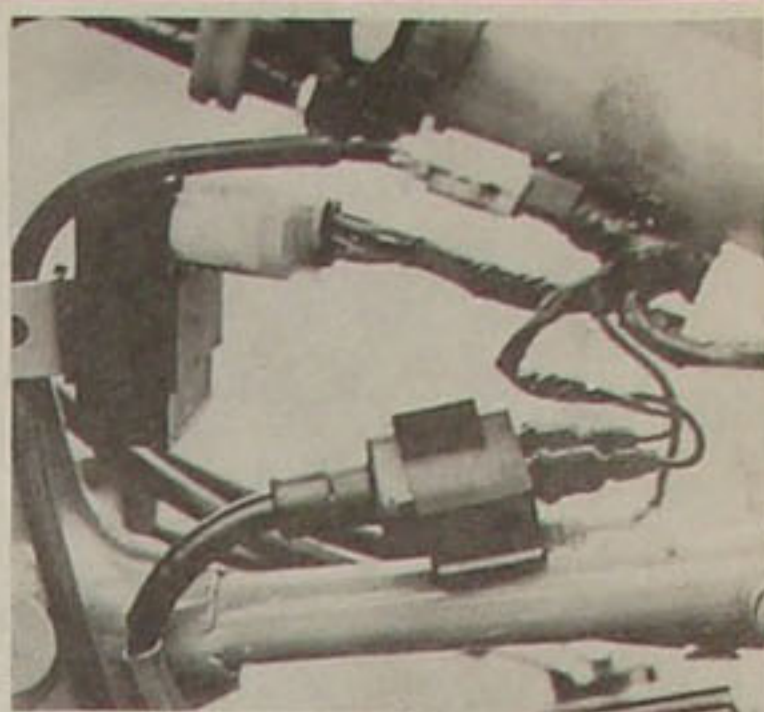
and I cannot see how Honda fall to see this. The front forks on the new bike work very well with no air pressure at sae 10 Rock Oil suspension fluid and the Pro-Link rear end is basically sound but is impossible to achieve any degree of stability at speed with such a ludicrously short distance between the wheel spindles.

A stiffer rear spring and two inches on the swinging arm would transform the bike. Even so, the XR is the best handling bike in the Honda range and in tight going, is a veritable demon.

The bike abounds with

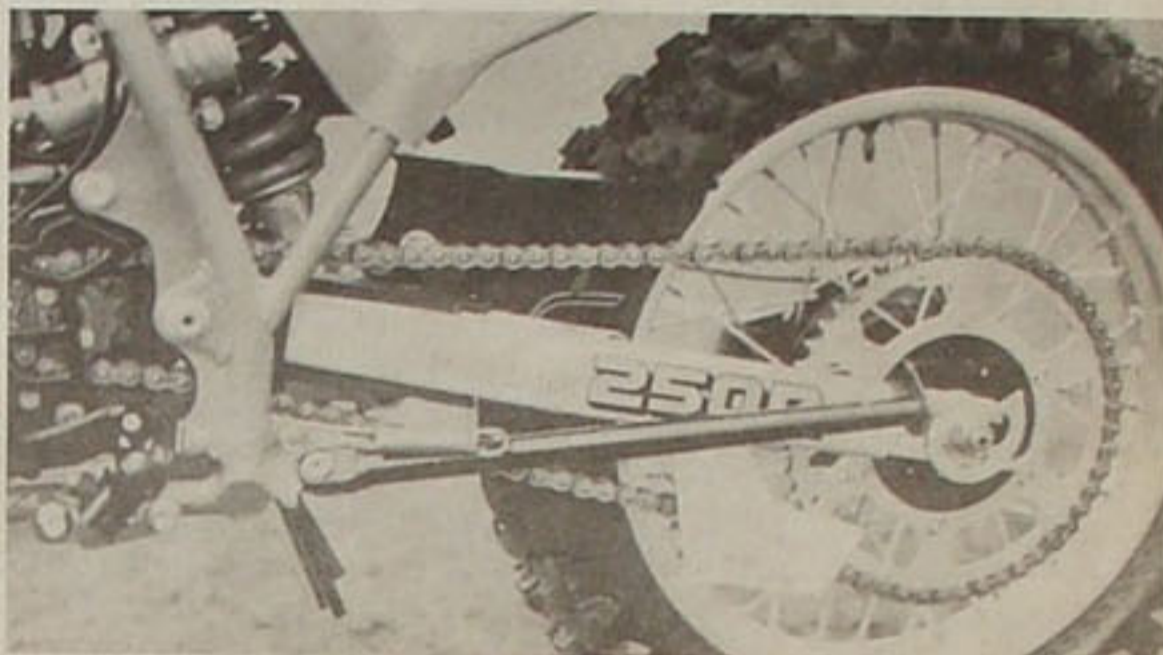
tricker than trick features. Up front, is a superb disc brake which would be more than adequate for stopping a 500cc G.P. motocross bike and on the XR is a case of gross overkill. Yes, it is a superb anchor and it works beautifully even after being totally immersed in water but it really is wasted on a bike with so much engine braking. It also looks to be very vulnerable and requires the rider to carry two spare levers during an event since the clutch and front brake are obviously not interchangeable.

Everywhere one looks there is meticulous attention to detail from the sturdy hand - protectors to the grease nipples serving every joint on the rear suspension and swinging arm. Throw away the IRC tyres, whose sidewalls



The mini coils which have cured the starting problems.

seem to be not so much steel braces as solid steel and the XR is ready to race. Incidentally, Honda



The swinging arm and Pro-link suspension. Both bikes have O-Ring chains fitted as standard - and useless 17 inch wheels when you want to fit trials tyres for those Army land events.



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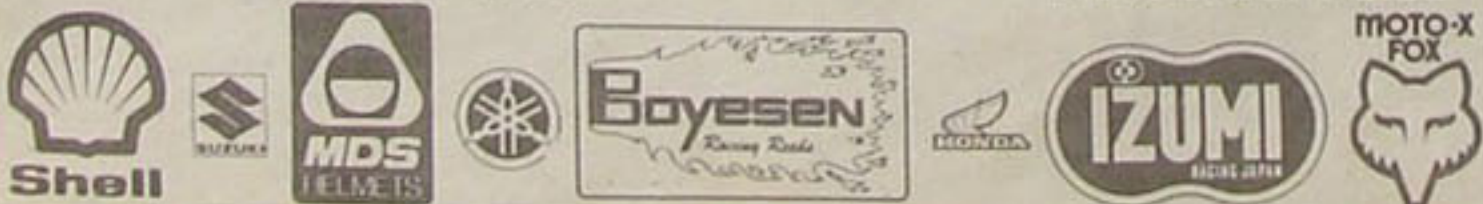
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are again having one of their silly phrases and have decided to fit a 17" rear wheel thus ensuring that as few choices of tyre as possible are available. In view of Honda's meritorious efforts in paring weight, their choice of steel for the swinging arm is equally puzzling. However the q.d. rear wheel and snail cam chain adjusters deserve praise.

Yes, the XR is complex, but in this case the technology produces the goods. It is fast, rideable and after three days of trying to get it not to start - including dragging the beast on its side out of a bog - I can assure any nervous prospective purchaser that the XR starts as well as anything. In all, the

definitive enduro four-stroke needing only a longer swinging arm to reach near perfection.

Mike Rapley adds: I can confirm most of Frank Melling's impressions of the XR 250. It is a superb enduro bike, a real racer and one that will prove as competitive against the two strokes as much as it will dominate the four stroke class.

The 64,000 dollar question is the starting. Frank is right, it does start but not quite as easily as most two strokes. Like all Honda four strokes, absolutely no throttle is the requirement for quick restarting once it has been stopped, but if it doesn't go after a few kicks, then the technique is to hold the throttle wide open and kick it over a cou-

ple of times, then try again with the throttle shut. It worked every time and didn't cause me any worries during the day of testing.

I disagree with Frank over the handling, maybe the bike I tested was set up a bit better. I found it marvellous, far more stable than I would have expected from such a short wheelbase and it inspired confidence that I lost once I took on a mortgage. As Frank said the IRC tyres left a lot to be desired particularly on loose sand when both myself and Andy Waters who was out riding the same day came off at the same place - twice.

One point Frank has missed when he talks about the 17 inch rear wheel, is that it will prove a mighty

problem for those forced to use trials tyres on Army land. There aren't any trials tyres that diameter, so it will mean fitting an 18 inch rim and maybe lengthening the swinging arm to get it in.

One last point to mention is that the air filter looks to be well designed though in practice water entered between the seat and air box and this would need to be taped up before use in an event. We had to drain both carbs which had taken in a bit of water - a job you certainly wouldn't want to do unless you had ten minutes in hand at a check, and nothing else to do.

All round the XR 250 isn't perfect, but so damn near and such an enjoyable ride that its little problems will be ignored just to own and race such a good bike.

She'll torque you out of trouble then fly!

THE introduction of Honda's XR 350 enduro bike into Britain last year was spoilt by it quickly getting a reputation of being difficult to start.

It was a reputation that was well justified, for even though some bikes performed perfectly, by and large the majority proved difficult to start at some time or other. What compounded the problem was the sheer inability of many riders to learn the obvious knack required. While this failing can't be blamed on the bike, it doesn't alter the fact that modern day machines should start without any hassle or hysterics no matter who is astride it, or even if it has been lugged sideways out of a bog.

Most two strokes will fire up readily come what may, and when a four-stroke doesn't oblige, it tends to get a bad reputation.

Thankfully Honda have realised that if the XR350 is to win many friends world wide, the starting had to be cured. The problem has been tackled by fitting new mini coils which have just about cured the basic problem, but in some situa-

tions the 350 still doesn't fire up as readily as it might.

The basic problem as far as I'm concerned is that at the bottom of each kickstarter stroke, my shin bashed the footrest. Not being a masochist, once I was aware I was going to bash myself each time I tried to start the bike, I didn't put as much effort into each kick, and to be sure of starting the bike, each kick has to be a good mighty full blooded swing.

So the timid approach doesn't work and it often won't start, but if you are made of sterner stuff (and different dimensions) and can manage to give the XR a good old swing, then she'll start OK.

Looking at the XR 250 and XR 350 together, one might ask why the problem manifested itself on the 350 and not on the 250. The reason is simple. On the 250 the footrest is slightly further forward and out of the way of my swinging shin, and being a shorter stroked engine, it turned over faster for the same amount of kicking. No doubt if the 350 footrest was out of the way she would start OK, but as I wasn't in a position to alter this, we shan't know for sure.

I've got the bad news out of the way first, for in all other respects the XR 350 is a smasher. At the test I spent a good long while riding the 250 and rather expected to find the 350 a handful. But once in the swing of things, the bigger motor was far more forgiving, with considerably more torque than the 250. To such a degree in fact that in tight sections I could be in two gears too high and she would still lug on without much complaint, whilst the 250 wanted to be changed down and complained if you didn't.



The XR 350 all ready to race - just a little bit bigger overall than the 250.

The 350 is just a bit bigger all round. The wheelbase is nearly two inches greater, there's nearly an inch more in the seat height, and it weighs about 15lbs more. But it also has an inch more suspension travel front and rear and this made travelling at speed just a shade more stable than the 250.

In the right hands the 350 is appreciably faster than the 250, and could be considered a bike for an expert while the 250, although fine for experts is a better clubman's bike than the 350.

The detail finish of the 350 is very similar to the 250, the most obvious difference being the rear brake linkage. On both bikes the quality of the tank, seat, mudguards, handguards, controls and riding position were excellent, indeed in this day and age if they aren't the bike won't be at the standard of its opposition. Honda lead the world in motorcycle design and have produced a very fine pair of enduro machines. They do have snags, though these don't affect the race performance. The twin carbs are very fiddly to get at and nobody in their right mind would have a go at them

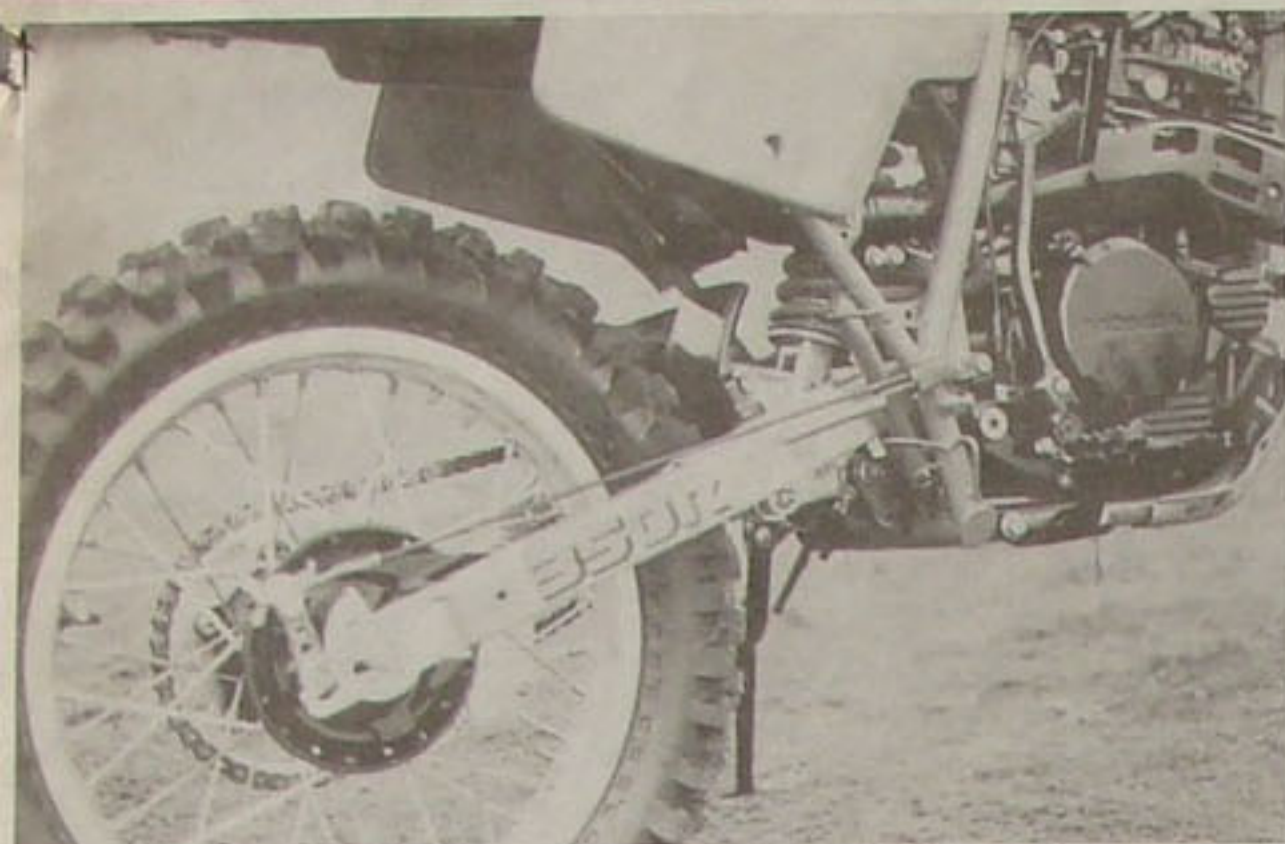
during competition, while washing the bike is a time consuming job to get all the gunge out of the many nooks and crannies.

But let's get back to the track. The 350 goes and handles well, it also stops well, courtesy of the disc front brake with dual piston, metal sintered pads, while the braided stainless steel hose is well routed and you would be unlucky to get it caught up in the forestry.

The front brake is really a case of overkill as combined with engine braking and the conventional drum rear brake, it would stop a lot more than 250lbs of bike plus rider.

The complexity of Honda's RFVC cylinder head need not worry the private owner too much. The instruction booklet provided gives a clear and concise description of servicing procedures which shouldn't have to be carried out very often. The RFVC system which is four radially positioned valves in a compact hemispherical combustion chamber boosts power and torque. Because it is not possible for the camshaft rockers to bear directly on

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Back end of the 350 showing the QD wheel and the linkage set-up.

It's in such conditions that the XR scores.

Just as on the 250, the XR 350 has a 17 inch rear wheel but this time fitted with Bridgestone tyres. I would venture to suggest that the Bridgestones were better than the IRCs, particularly the front. I came off the 250 twice with the front wheel breaking away and so did Andy Waters who was testing at the time, but neither of us came off the 350. It might have been a coincidence, but we think not. That 17 inch wheel is a pain, as it means — as already mentioned in the 250 test — there are no suitable trials tyres for use on Army land, which means fitting an 18 inch rim and the attendant problems.

Incidentally, the lights fitted have no switch which means they are on all the time the engine is running and can't be turned off or dipped, not that it matters, but don't go searching for a switch as there 'aint one!

An overall analysis of the XR 350 is that it is a bike for a rider of some ability rather than an average clubman, it handles superbly, is as quick as you are (and if you're too quick for it then you should be riding something else), and in the four-stroke class will hold its own against the opposition. As for the starting, well, only you'll know whether it is a problem, but even if it is, then moving the footrest will probably cure the snag.

the valve stems because of the radial positioning around the central spark plug, sub rockers are used.

Twin carburettors don't make the throttle action appreciably stiffer, but it is possible to feel the second carb come into operation. The first, left hand carb is the one with the jetting and operates from low to mid-range, with the second, right hand carb coming in about a third through the range and catches up the first carb. A reed valve is used in the inlet tract to balance the flow. On the track there is a noticeable increase in urge when the second carb gets going which makes the bike very rapid, but even with the first carb doing all the work, it's still quick through the slow bits and

SPECIFICATION

	XR250	XR350 (where different)
Engine	OHC four stroke, four valve, RFVC single	
Bore and stroke	75mm x 56.5mm	84mm x 61.3mm
Capacity	249cc	339cc
Compression ratio	10.2:1	9.5:1
Carburettors	2 x 44mm piston valve type	2 x 26mm piston valve type
Power output	29 PS/9000 rpm	32.24 PS/7000 rpm
Ignition	CDI	
Starter	Primary kick	
Transmission	Six speed	
Length, width height	2035 x 865 x 1180mm	2125 x 840 x 1200mm
Wheelbase	1360mm	1405mm
Seat height	900mm	920mm
Ground clearance	315mm	310mm
Tank capacity	9 ltr + 1.5 reserve	12 litres + 3 reserve
Tyres — front	3.00 x 21 6PR	
rear	4.60 x 17 6PR	5.10 x 17
Suspension — front	Air assist 38mm with 254mm travel	Air assist 24mm with 280mm travel
rear	Pro-link 244mm travel	Pro-link 280mm travel
Brakes — front	Single hydraulic disc with dual piston caliper and metal sintered pads	
rear	Drum	
Weight	105kg	112kg
Price	£1425	£1545
Importer	Honda UK, Power Road, Chiswick	



Wilf Harvey's MX 80 in standard trim with all the odd bits taken off and the restrictor taken out.

Wilf's little demon

WILF HARVEY, Britain's assistant ISDE Team Manager has been campaigning a diminutive Honda MX 80 in the trail bike class of East Anglian enduros, and even rode it in the Natterjack until the sand took its ultimate toll just a check away from the finish.

The original idea was to simply see if the MX80 could be made into a proper enduro bike for the 80cc class in the future, but it has now changed direction and is being used as a demonstration exercise to prove the engine and chassis of the trail bike.

Wilf's bike is a bog standard MX80 with all the extraneous bits taken off, the standard shock absorber replaced by one from a CR 80 and a more substantial chain guide fitted. The engine is just as it comes in production form though the restrictor washer welded into the exhaust to keep the power below the 12hp Learner Limit has been removed.

Riding the 80 is not hard work as the engine doesn't need to be kept in a narrow power band though regular changing of gears is necessary to keep the motor on the boil (not literally). The power band is fairly wide and even if you drop out of it it doesn't choke up and stall, merely burbles along until you dip the clutch or get another gear. Most power is produced at about 1/2-throttle, once you wind it to its limit the engine output flattens considerably and an upward change of gear is called for.

The suspension performed admirably well but it took longer to learn to ride it fast than one would have expected. The motocross damper was a great improvement over the standard shocker according to Wilf and transformed the performance. The front forks were as they come and so far have held up to the pounding without stress.

As an exercise in converting a road/trail bike into competition use it has been outstandingly successful, and becomes a very cheap way of entering enduros at very little cost once a secondhand bike is acquired. In the trail bike class a good rider will be on a winner as Wilf has proved, but even in the Clubman class of some events it will prove fast enough to stay on time, but unlikely to be fast enough on the special tests to get on to Gold schedule. It won't persuade someone riding a bigger machine to drop on to a Honda MX80, but it may persuade some others to have a go at the sport, and that is a benefit.

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