

AUSTRALIAN

# TRAIL & TRACK

JULY, 1981, \$1.20

**Tests;**

**IT465 YAMAHA**

**RM465 SUZUKI**

**XL185 S HONDA**

**MONTY 248 TRIALS**

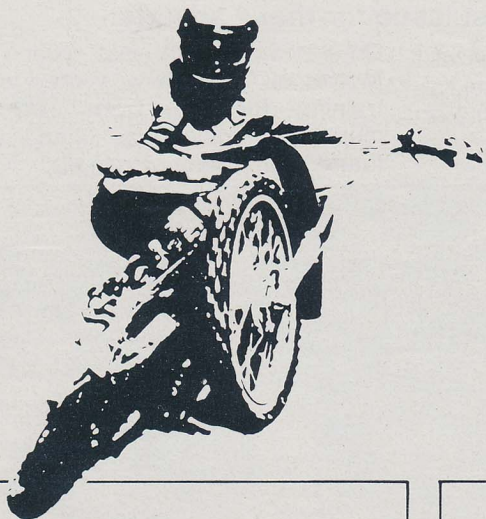


**Features;**

**UK 4-STROKE MX**

**VIC 125 MX ROUND**

**Mr MOTO-X, QLD ROUND**



# TRAIL & TRACK

Australia's top seller

JULY 1981, Number 94

MANAGING EDITOR  
Les Swallow

TESTERS  
Norm Lindsay  
Mark Tyler  
Murray Crawford  
Pete Whittington

CONTRIBUTORS  
Julie Joyce  
Norm Watts  
Keith Flavell  
Peter Nash  
Graham Monro  
Jeff Whittington  
Trev Day.

COLUMNISTS  
Murray Tainton

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IT465 "H"



XL185SB



RM465 "X"



248 COTA

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Craig Scott  
Average sales per issue for 6 months to July — 15,019  
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# HONDA XL185SB

## Two for the Price of One

I have had a close association with the XL185S since its inception in 1979. The tremendous heart of this little thumper inspired me to rebuild one for my Simpson Desert Road Record at that time. Such has been its impact that the XR200 was developed from basically the same bike.

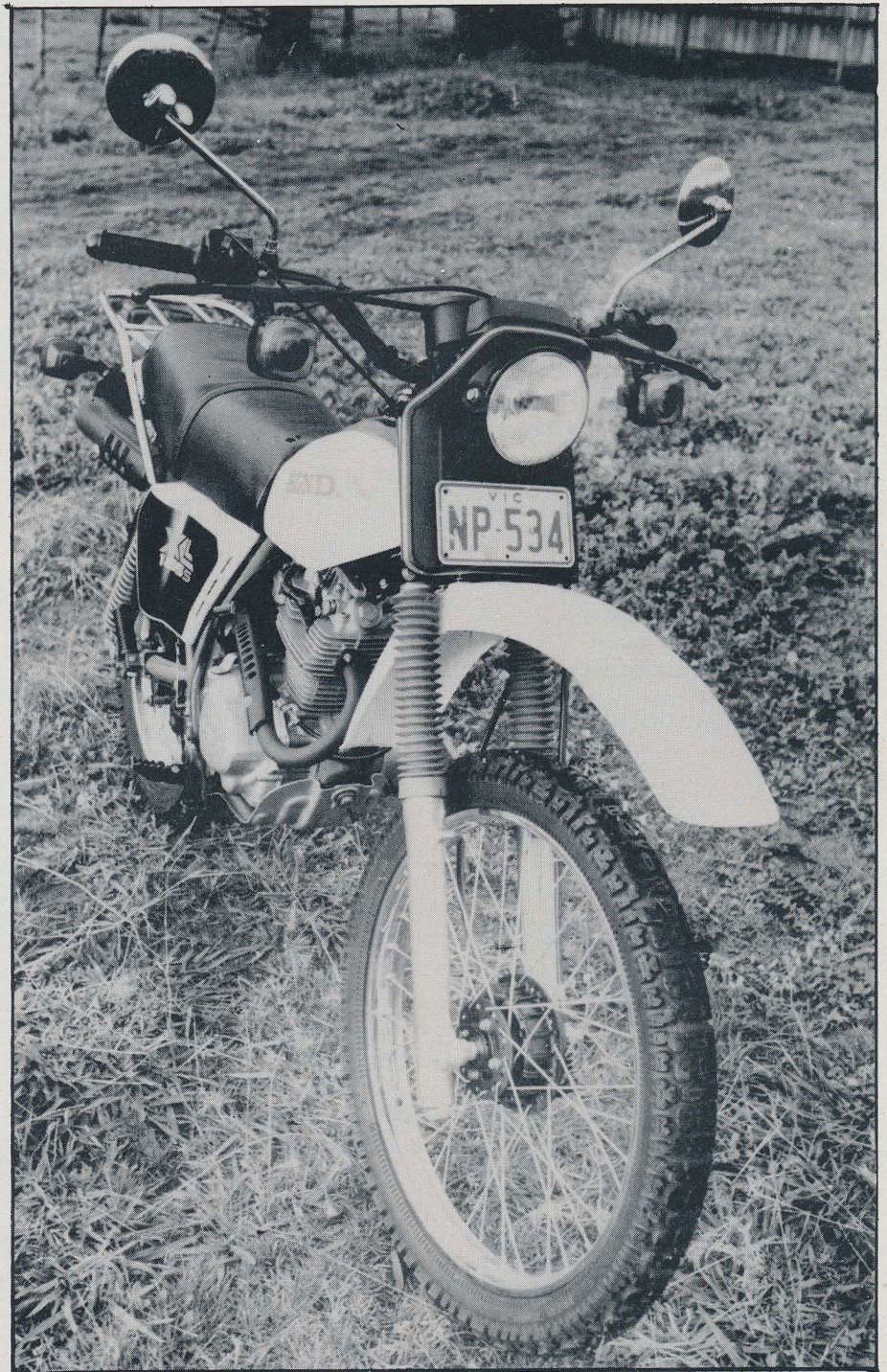
185 I have not ridden a standard model, so it was like getting back to grass roots for me when I climbed aboard the new test bike and reaffirmed the versatility of this very pleasant to ride dual purpose bike.

As with all the XL models there is little difference in the SB from the S model, the most noticeable being the colour change. The frame and springs and new fork boots have changed from black to red, while the Honda sticker on the tank, is in plain red with the tank top having a black and red (tape) strip down it.

Other changes include the addition of fork boots, a wider front guard, a one-way valve on the end of the breather pipe, XR chain guard and the XR chain tensioner; hardly anything that is going to alter the bike drastically from last year's model, or the original model for that matter; and yet even in 1981 this 185 does an admirable job.

The twin valve motor still sporting its traditional and very efficient centrifugal filter, is very smooth as are all the XL motors, with a noticeable lack of vibration. It is a one-kick starter on most occasions and idles beautifully. On cold mornings you just pull the choke out all the way, one kick and as it starts push it in a little. Once warm, you push the choke in completely and starting can be achieved without it. On my 185 I never use the choke — it is such a good starter. Seldom will the motor stall at low revs when breaking into a corner, for instance.

The 185 has a proven low maintenance record and guaranteed reliability and although not an exceptionally fast motor, it suits the job it is intended to do. It will rev right out to 10 thousand under load without any problems. On firm terrain operation at 4 to 7 thousand revs



The XL185 is good value for money.

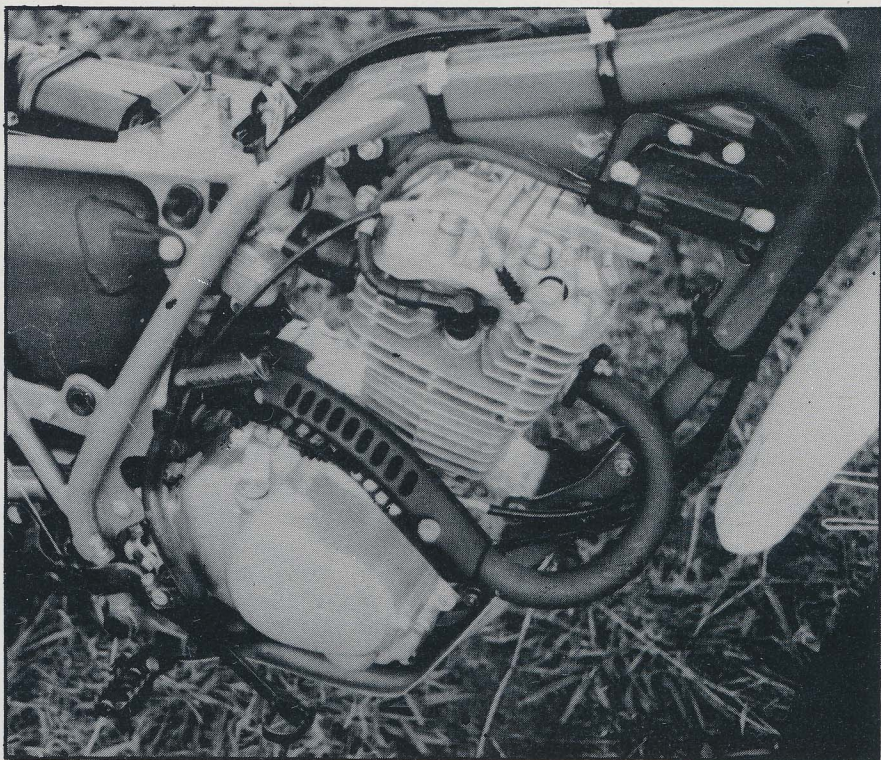
achieves good results. But for maximum results higher revs will be needed.

Strong, well proven and now red, the frame has remained unaltered since the first 185. It has proved good enough to be the mainstay of the XR200. I have pounded my frame unmercifully and never even cracked it. The subframe has a weak spot between the shocker gusset and the seat gusset, where it will bend if you are unfortunate enough to come over backwards; however, a quick burst with the welder would fix this.

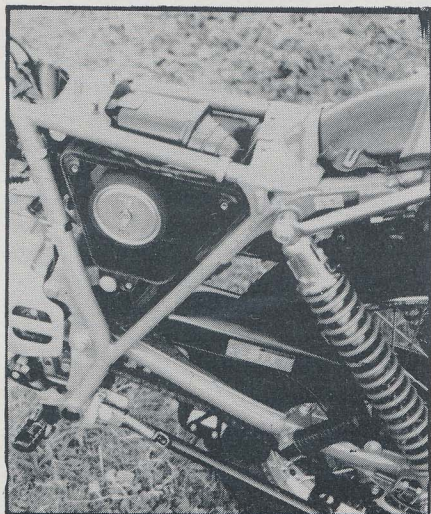
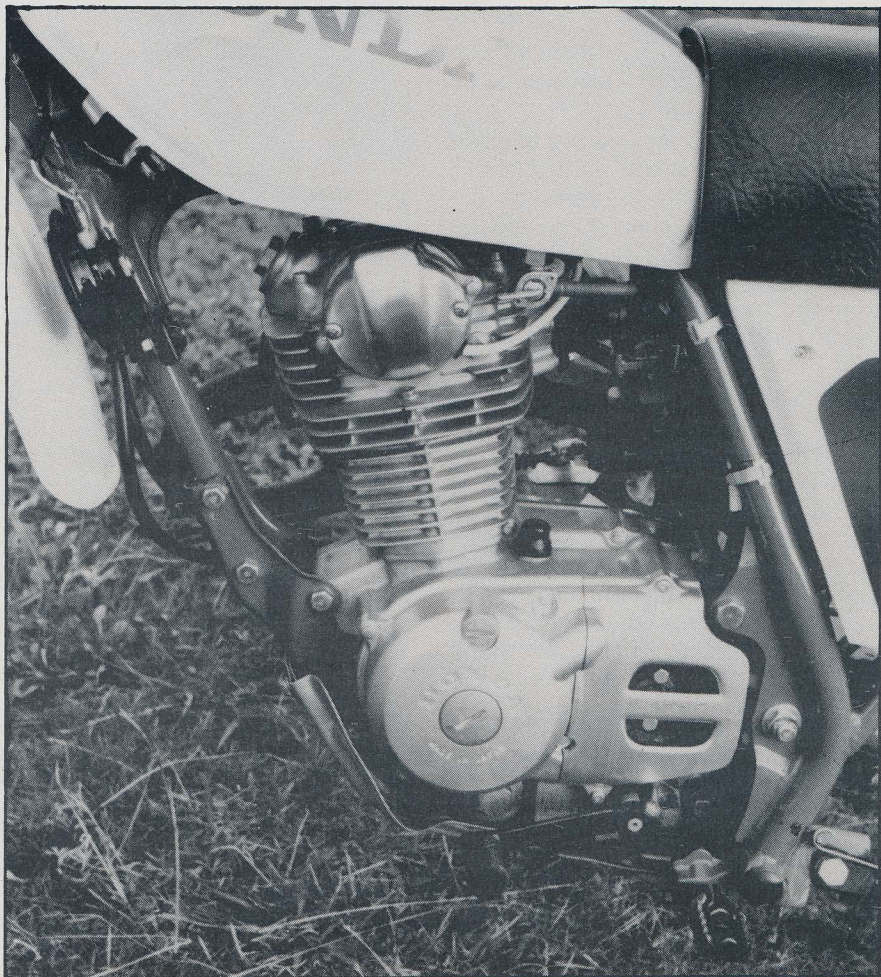
The one advantage of having this weak spot is that if you have a tendency to go over backwards often, then at least the frame will bend in this relatively unimportant place rather than transferring it to a vital part of the frame which would be more costly and difficult to fix. The frame is well crafted, well gusseted and contributes much to the good handling of the bike.

Although the back guard remains the same, that is steel strong and heavy, the front guard has been widened, which is a marked difference from the original, but it is a pity that the back of the guard could not have been also widened and lengthened to stop the mud being thrown all over the motor. Widening the front guard certainly helps keep the rider cleaner.

At the front the new XR plastic headlight/numberplate housing offers a place to put your number plate, helps keep mud off your electricals while allowing easy access to them and offers minimally more protection to the headlight, which incidentally shows



The well proven engine revs quite high.



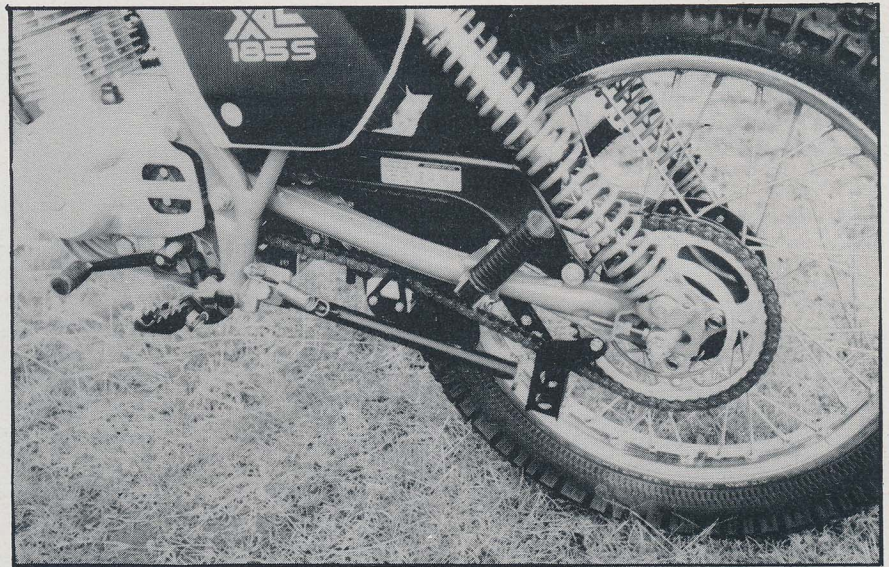
Air cleaner is easily serviced.

quite a good beam. Unfortunately the housing offers no protection at all to the trip meter knob (or the choke cable) which hangs out the left side of the speedo and is just begging to be smashed. Even a flexible knob in such an exposed position is liable to damage.

This problem occurs on many bikes and it would be more sensible to have the knob at the back or right hand side back of the speedo where it would be protected as speedos are not cheap to replace. Both the speedo and a tacho are supplied; each allowing easy reading both day and night.

All the usual switches are there on the bars, together with the improved quality levers, the front blinkers, which are not very flexible and are better removed for bush bashing. An old fashioned twist grip is still on the bike, but is acceptable for this dual purpose machine. All the cabling is neat and well routed and it is nice to note that Honda have wisely retained the speedo cable guide on this 185.

While the two back blinkers are flexible and less prone to damage, the large back tail light is one item to watch



For what its is the rear end is fair enough.

when in the bush as it often breaks as a result of backing the bike into a tree where it is used not very effectively as a bumper bar.

Being long and comfortable, the seat can accommodate a pillion easily

and pillion pegs are supplied on the swingarm.

A very handy feature on this bike is the subframe, which due to the thoughtful indentations in the back mud guard, makes a great grab rail or



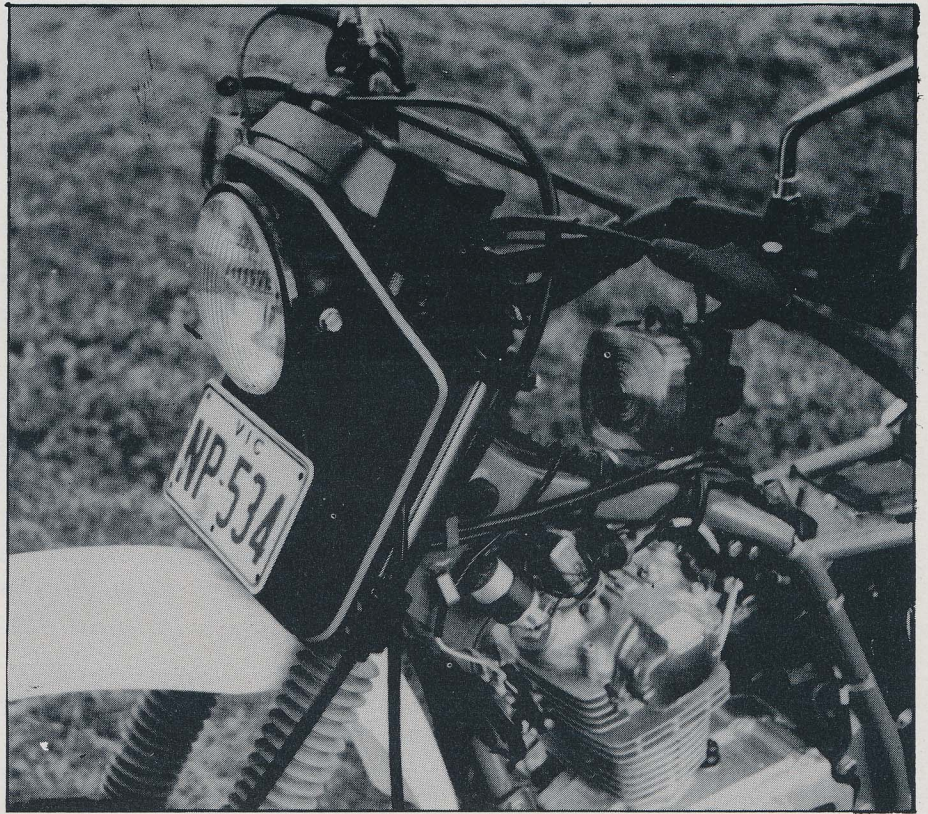
This Honda is "whisper quiet" and a joy to use on the road as well as in the bush.

place to hook your ocky straps when carrying something.

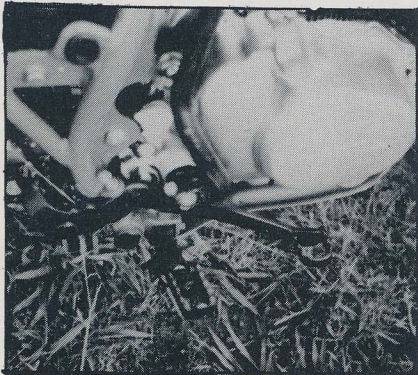
Predictable and with a nice feel to them, the brakes will pull you up quite quickly when dry but need some grooves if you are constantly in deep water. Unfortunately the back brake lever (and the gear lever) still hangs down below the bashplate and can be subject to a fair amount of abuse from the terrain.

Wheels and hubs are "a la originale," steel rims, average size spokes and circlip arrangement holding the sprocket on the back hub, with the chain jar being soaked up by the rubber buffers around the sprocket bolts.

Other good features on the 185 are a loud horn, iron protectors at the ends of the bars to stop hand grips from being ripped, an XR chain guard which works well and a good secure feel to the hand grips. An XR chain tensioner is also fitted standard. Contrary to some reports that it malfunctions, I found it worked well and was a definite improvement to the bike. Once again the chain guide bends out of shape fairly easily and should be discarded after such an occurrence.



All you need for street and trail in this dept.



Brake lever sticks out a bit too much.

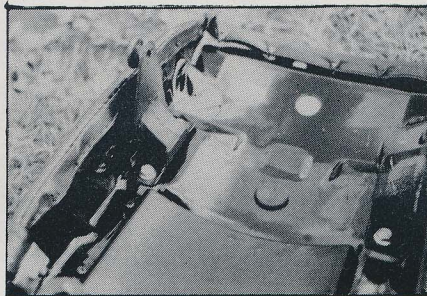
Chain adjustment is by the usual awkward bolt and lock nut, while the large wing nut on the back brake adjustment makes this function quick and easy; instant brake condition is obtained from the simple-to-read brake wear indicators. The bright red fork boots give the seals a longer, more leak proof life.

The seven litre tank seems small, but with over 80mpg on good going, that can give you a range of over 140 miles, which is not bad. Economy has

to be one of the main features of this bike. Even in the very rough stuff you can get as high as 50mpg.

I would suggest that owners tie the right hand side cover on to the top of the frame so that if it is pulled out of its rubber mounts, it is not lost. One other word of advice; if you go in the bush, don't leave your tools in the plastic tool box situated on the left hand side, as first time something comes in contact with the flimsy plastic lid hinge, it will break off and spill your tools onto the ground.

On the road or for light trail work the standard claw tyres are quite o.k.



Seat mounts have rubber "sandwich" mounts — means less vibrations through seat and allows bolt holes to line-up easily.

although be careful in rocks as the walls are pretty flimsy.

Another top feature of the 185SB is the lack of noise. It is probably the quietest bike I have ridden. Sometimes while waiting at a set of lights you will think the bike has stopped and go to start it only to find it is still idling. The massive and weighty anti-pollution box and efficient muffler achieve this delightfully quiet ride.

While bottoming on reasonably rough stuff the 165mm back and 200mm travel front suspension is fine for road or light trail. If you were to do more trail than road a new set of back shocks will eventually be needed as the standard ones are not the best.

At 105.5kg (232lbs), the XL185SB is heavier than it feels to ride. You have no trouble touching the ground and many difficult sections are cleaned without the usual fall due to not being able to 'foot'. Turning is very quick and precise with the 27-50° fork rake, making slower trials picking through tight sections extremely easy.



**XL185S HONDA**

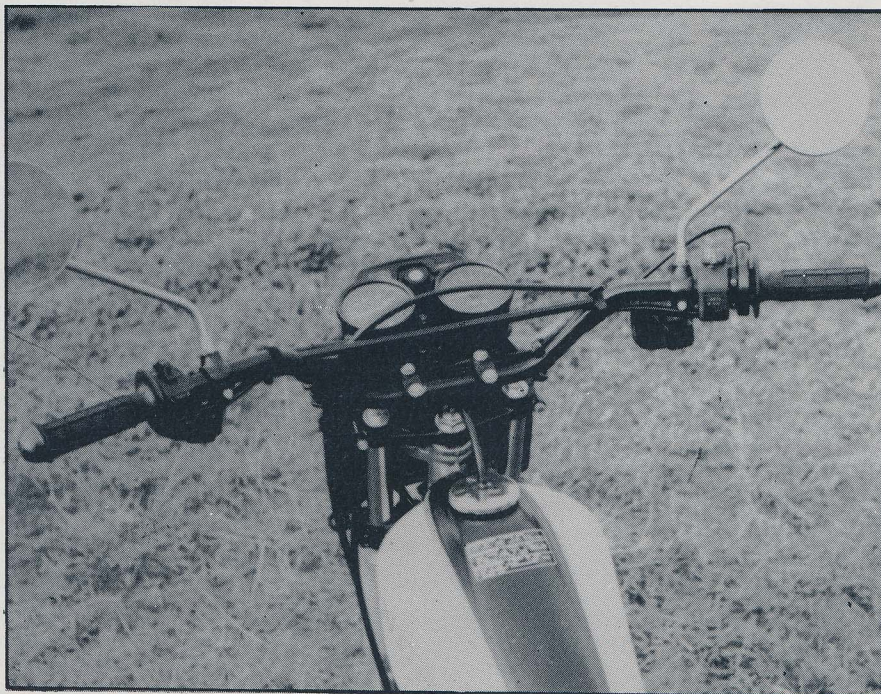
The 13th tooth front and standard back sprocket allows the 13hp 5 speed donk to pull the 428 chain around very slowly indeed, or if one is on the road 70-75mph top speed can be achieved. Cruising at 60mph is no trouble. The bike feels good travelling at this speed with no nasty wabbles.

Generally I would describe the 185 as docile, but you will be quite surprised at just how fast it can go if you slip through the gears while you hold it between 7-9 thousand revs.

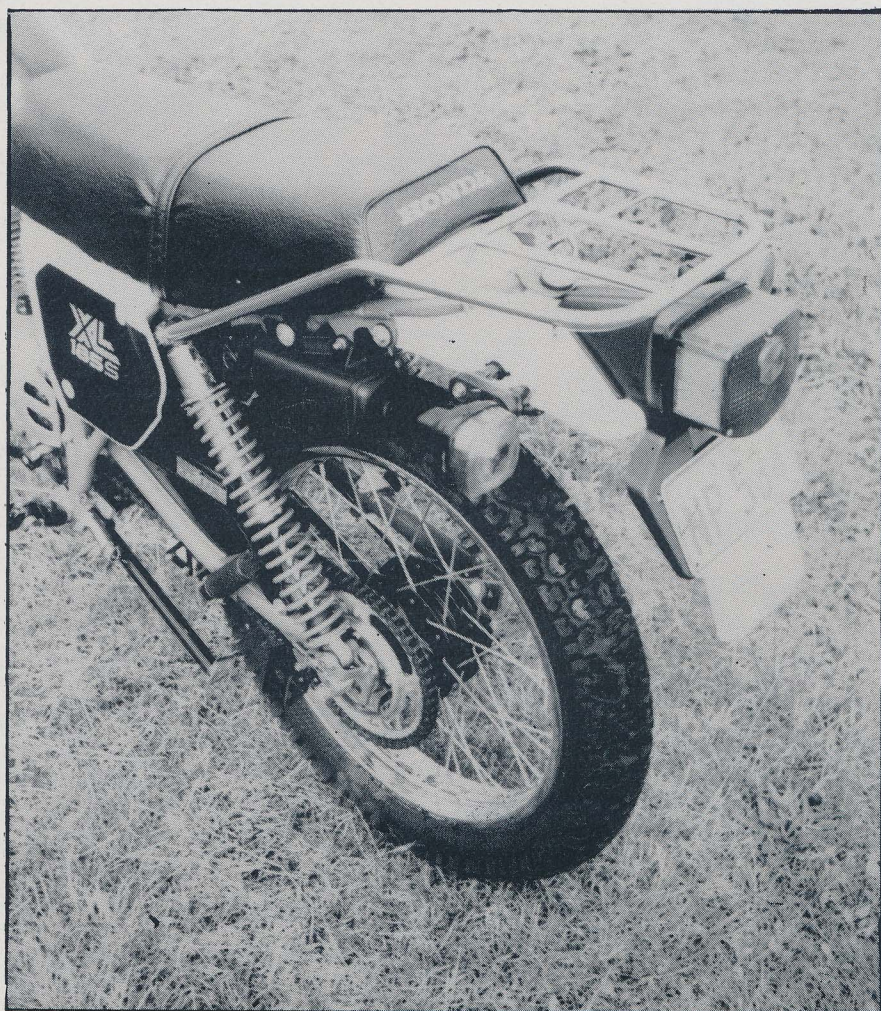
It seems the motor wants to rev. In fact it will run the needle off the clock if you want to but this is not advisable as even at 7-9 thousand a lot of heat is generated. To give you some idea the 185 held off two modded KLX250's in rough going for quite some time. In the tight stuff one guy said he would rather ride the 185 than his IT465.

In sand the steep fork angle makes the front a little twitchy, but still quite controllable. This is a nice one with the 185; when it does get out of its depth, it doesn't go crazily out of control but rather progressively gets harder to handle.

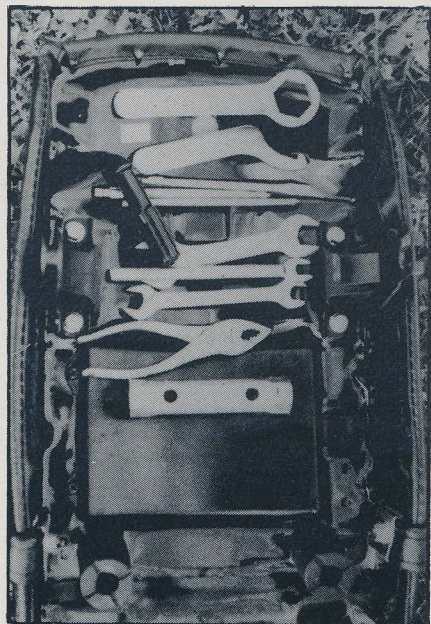
On steep hills the short swing arm makes the bike stand up like the XR200, but this and many other criticisms I have made here, are rather minor compared to the same criticisms on the XR200, for the simple reason, that this bike will not or is not designed to be subject to such severe off road conditions as the XR and therefore, as much of its life may be



Everything that's the "norm" in the dept from Honda.



Carrier is an after market job.



Tool kit is comprehensive and mainly forgings.

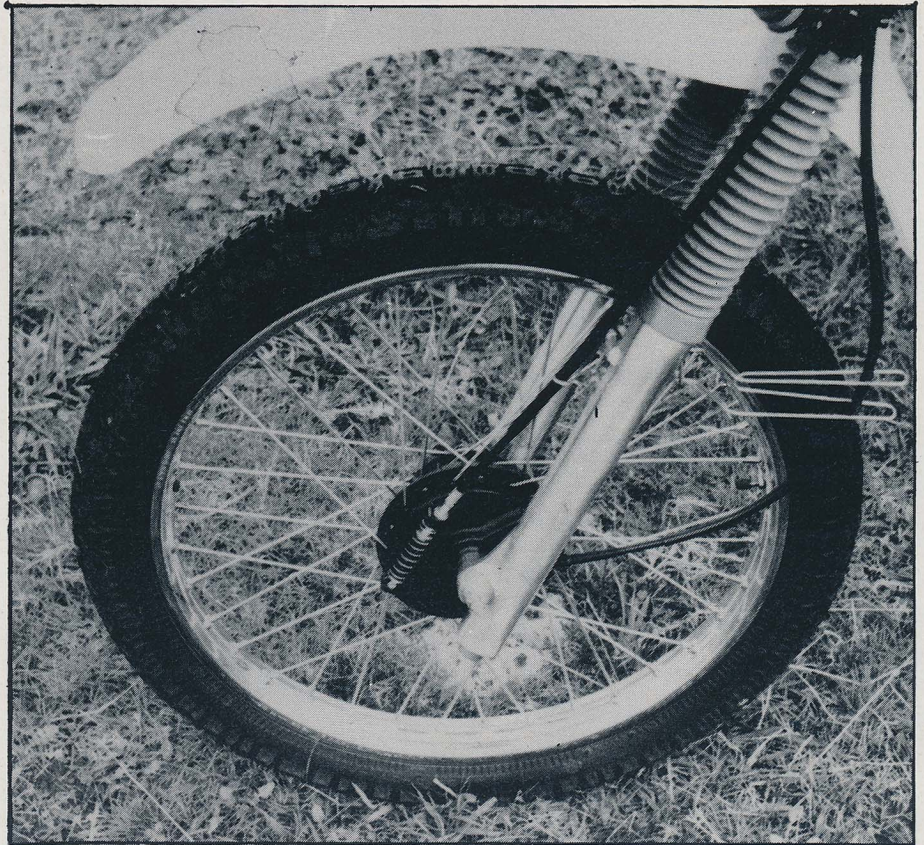


spent on the road, many of these things are quite acceptable.

Personally, (this was echoed by others that road the bike) I found the XL185SB a pleasure to ride. It features many of the advantages you look for in a dual purpose bike for instance. Light weight, excellent fuel economy, comfortable seating and comfortable road speed, while displaying good handling (in conditions it was designed for) and above all reliability.

At \$1219 it represents great value. What's more, you can be assured of many enjoyable years of commuting and trail riding on this excellent little thumper.

**MURRAY CRAWFORD**



Front brake worked well in dry.



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