

Which Bike?

NOVEMBER
60p

40

EVERY MONTH ALL NEW AND USED BIKE PRICES

**YOUR FIRST ENDURO:
KAWASAKI'S MILD
KE175D OR HONDA'S
MEATY XR250?**

**MOTO GUZZI'S
LE MANS MK II
-THE SUPERFAST
SHAFTIE
PLUS:
SANGLAS S2,
KAWASAKI
Z400G
& CHOOSING
A CHAIN-
THE MISSING
LINK**



Which Bike?

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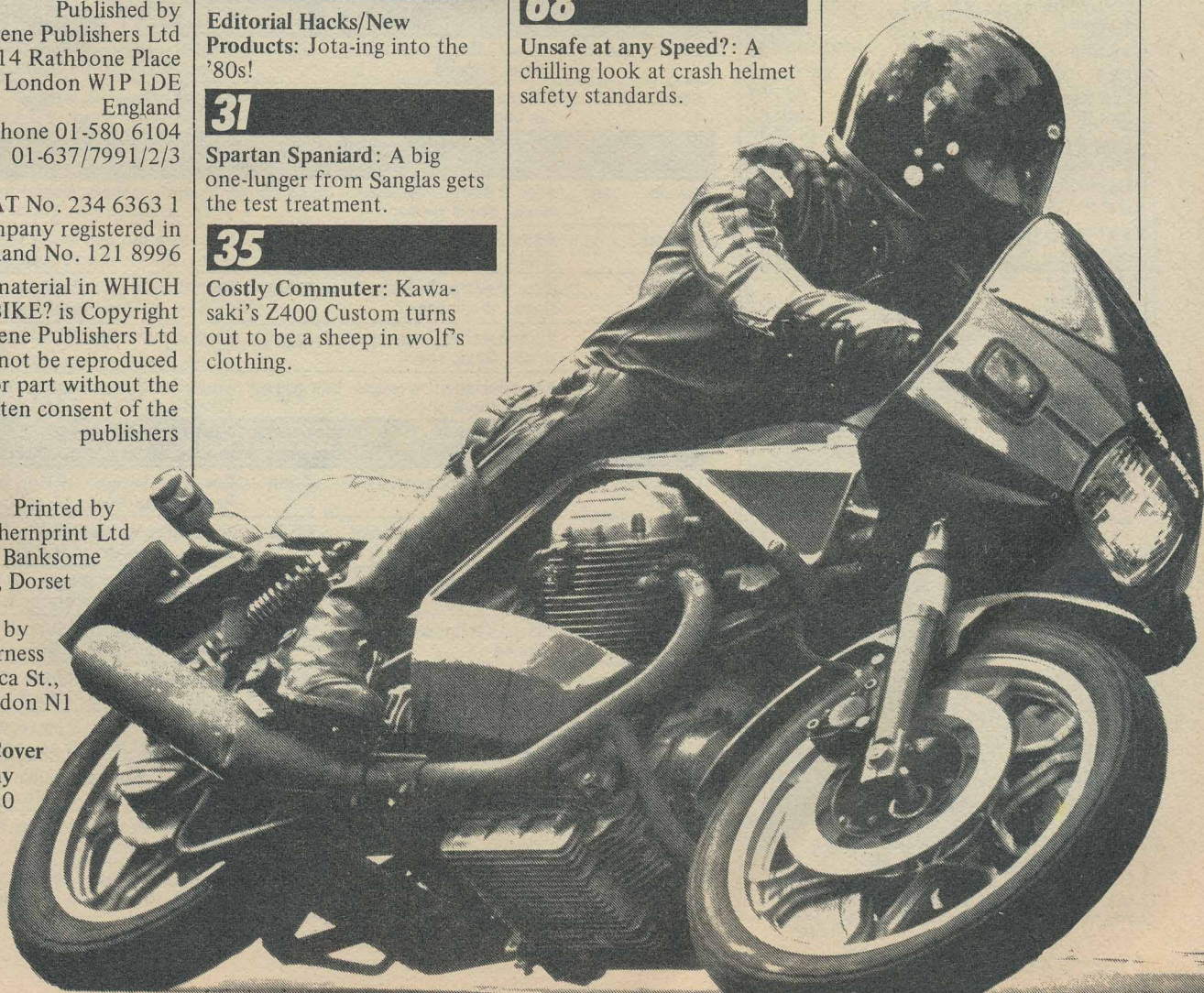
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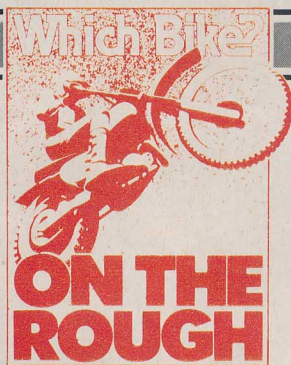
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MILD AND MEATY

Take two dirt bikes. Two very different dirt bikes, but each, if you are to believe the advertising blurb, exactly suited to the purpose they were built for.

Martin Christie checks them out. Photography by *John Perkins*.

HONDA XR 250 KAWASAKI KE 175D

The object of putting the new KE175 alongside the XR250, was not to draw any invidious comparisons between the two, but to see just how close those individual manufacturer's claims came to reality.

Then there's a further, and very important aspect for the off-road buyer in the dubious and much-debated grey-green area between trail bikes and enduro bikes proper. Trail bikes are getting better, year by year: are they closing the gap where the average clubman would be better off saving his pennies on a suitable compromise, rather than lashing out on a pukka racer?

It's impossible to raise the

question without pointing at the Yamaha DT175 MX, which has flourished in the clubman's camp like daffodils in the spring and set a standard as the ultimate economy off-road mount. The reply to that bike from the other Japanese makers has been eagerly awaited, but so far the response looks like being disappointing. Kawasaki's claimant gives all the appearance of answering the call. It looks attractive, tidy and thoughtful, with even a touch of latent aggression in the hump-backed petrol tank, styled on moto cross fashion.

It's odd, therefore, that big K haven't really carried





the job through. For all it's impressive specifications, it has some serious deficiencies; not drastic ones for an average trail bike, but important ones for a bike that looks, and the maker's claim, to be a serious challenger on the dirt.

It starts with the motor. Kawasaki have abandoned their old disc-valve unit in favour of a more conventional piston-ported power unit with a reed valve. The engine, in fact, as far as the crankcases go, is very much like that used on the small capacity moto cross bikes. This has advantages as far as lightness and compactness goes, but the crippling failure is the five-speed gearbox.

It seems an extraordinary choice when, long before anyone else, Kawa's humble KE125 boasted six ratios in the box, and transformed the inevitably underpowered mount into something more tractible and useful. The new KE175 cries out for those cogs. As it is, the ratios are in all the wrong places, and top is already too low to get away with reducing the overall gearing. A bigger rear sprocket would bring the practical top speed down to something like 55mph.

The motor is lively and responsive enough, and there's probably a lot of tuning potential in it. But without the gearbox choice, the cause is damned from the start.

The gap between first and second seems too big to fill except with another gear. Without it you're left struggling with the gearbox, trying to keep the motor boiling.

This is frustrating, mainly because Kawasaki have done their homework with much of the rest of the bike. Gone are the old rubber footrests, and in come metal, folding, serrated ones, with neat pedals tucked out of harms way. Wide, moto cross handlebars, smart levers and grips – the bike bristles with good features.

Somewhere along the line something went wrong. Either the computer got unplugged, or the designer went off sick and got his appetite to finish the job off. This begins to look suspiciously accurate as the KE175 deteriorates rapidly as you move along it





from the front wheel to the back.

The front forks are magnificent — far better than the DT's — with a leading axle and a good eight inches of movement. They hold a nice conical hub with a good brake laced round an alloy rim, and shaded by a reasonable plastic mudguard.

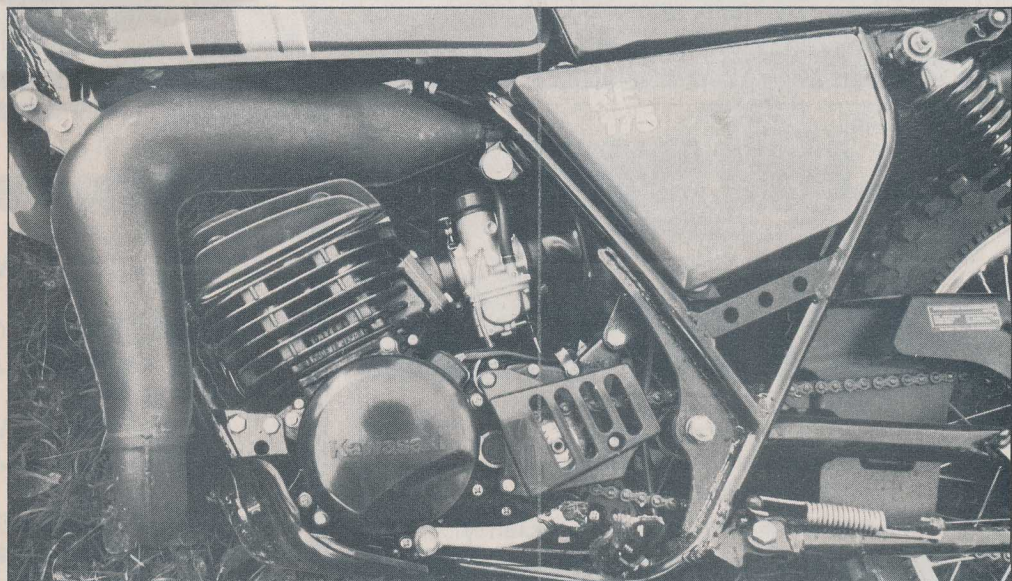
The petrol tank, as mentioned, looks really raunchy and has a plastic screw-on cap with vent pipe. There's a plastic sump shield coming well up the front of the frame, and a really racey exhaust system that snakes round from one side of the down tube to the other before disappearing under the seat.

The radial-finned head, and barrel are crammed with rubber bungs to keep the noise down, and the carburettor has a big rubber cap over the top. The external crankshaft covers are plastic, which is a bit disconcerting for hard off-road use, though there is no reason to suppose that a polycarbonate material would not be as resilient to rocks as the regular thin alloy plate. Another, separate plastic cover, with slots, shields the gearbox sprocket.

The air filter box is concealed between the side panels — jammed between the battery on one side and the oil tank on the other. It's accessible by removing the seat, has a tool tray on top, and some cunningly positioned air intakes with rubber flaps that should keep out most evil elements.

So far so good — in fact, verging on the excellent. All the more curious then that it should start to go wrong. The aforementioned seat is held on by two mickey-mouse spring-loaded knobs in the middle of each side. They do not hold it very firm, are awkward to use, and the thin metal plates that mate with them are far too flimsy. It will not take much of a knock to rip the seat off, even if it doesn't fall off of its own design.

The short plastic rear mudguard gives only the briefest recognition of the job it's supposed to do, and the rear light assembly, bolted on to the very frail end of it, has all the hallmarks of a bodge-up. The indicators and their mounting stalks are an integral part of the assembly, so you



Kawasaki's new reed-valve engine is quite a different proposition from the "old" disc-valved KE175. Note also the extensive frame gusseting. Chain is only a 428 whilst the XR's is a 520.

can't even remove them for safety, or move them back. They stick out like claws waiting for a chance to snag and rip the whole thing off. The rear suspension units have unusually sophisticated springs which are progressively wound to give alternative ratings — instead of just slapping on two separate coils. Unfortunately, on our test bike anyway, the springs were far too good for the dampers which didn't appear to have any resistant effect on their action at all.

This gave the KE175's handling on the bumps all the characteristics of a pogo stick.

There's no chain tensioner, but just a primitive attempt at a chain guide underneath the rear sprocket where it can bend and pull the chain off, and on top the merest concession to a chain guard.

Taken all round then, the KE175 is not as impressive as its appearances suggest. Analysing its shortcomings, it's difficult to believe that anyone as experienced as Kawasaki could have gone so far, and yet left so much unfinished. It leaves the suspicion they may have something more up their sleeve for the serious off-road rider.

The KE175 is definitely a trail bike compromise in the classic mould — running the risk of pleasing no one exactly, and falling some way short of its promise as a dirt bike.

In answer to our second question, this machine in no sense bridges the gap towards a proper enduro mount, and almost tends to widen it. Honda's XR250 is a very

different animal, and as it falls neatly into the role of an ideal beginner's machine, it illustrates just how huge that gap is becoming.

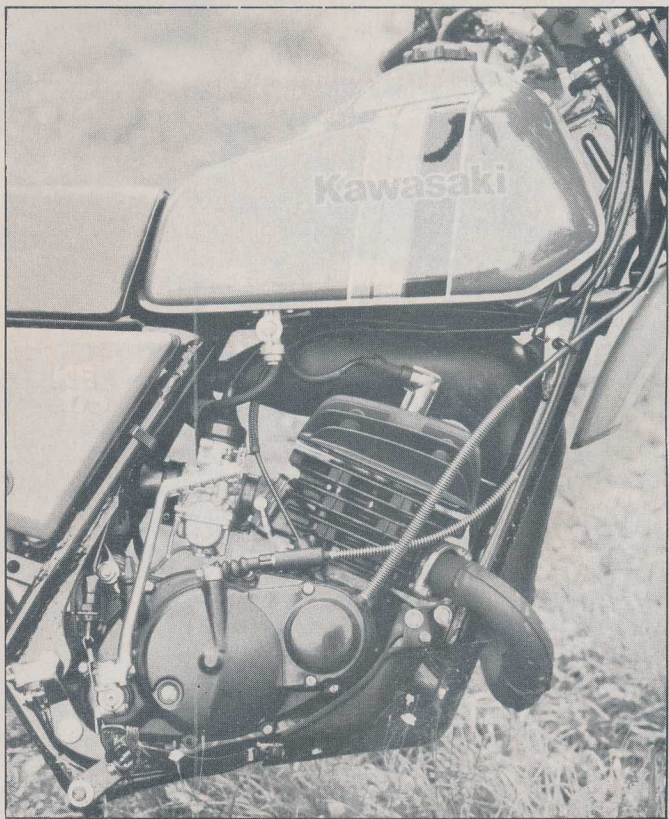
Obviously, it's more expensive — a lot more expensive. But you'd have to spend something like the difference to get a bike like the Kawasaki anything like competitive. It's the difference between a bike that is totally sorted out and suited to its purpose.

The Honda is very deceptive. Because it uses the same basic motor as the XL250, and virtually the same chassis,

it's easy to regard it as a modified trail bike. That is, until you ride it.

It has its limitations, but for a mass-produced motorcycle, it is extremely impressive, mostly because it is so easy to ride. It has to be taken very seriously alongside its only near competitors — the Suzuki PE175/250s.

It gives the same soft, forgiving ride, and the reassurance that it can cope with all the bumps and obstacles even when the intrepid pilot is starting to get a little tired and ragged.



Like the Honda XR, the Kawasaki's engine is well protected, although the over-slung exhaust system is unavoidably vulnerable.



It has the inevitable disadvantage of weight alongside the PE, but that is rather made up for by the fact that the motor is far more flexible and what it may give away in outright horsepower, it gains on traction and useable pulling power.

Honda have done the right thing by the four-stroke motor. They've made it buzzy to give a better spread of smooth power all the way through the range. There's no power band as such — just a constant, predictable surge. You just dial in the throttle and let the back wheel do the rest. While it won't actually plonk at the bottom end, it will go down low without stalling, and allow the engine to be pulled back on the revs again.

The basic XL250S is good. The XR is exceptional, because Honda have given it another 2,000 rpm at top end, with a bigger, 30mm carb to feed it, and one tooth less on the gearbox sprocket. This makes it one of the liveliest and most responsive four-strokes ever.

It will please thumper fans, and tempt many two-stroke men away from petrol with its performance. As it comes, the gearing is right for enduros, with first and second low enough for tight sections, and fifth high enough to give a 70mph dash down the fire-breaks.

It is sold as a racing bike, with no guarantee, perhaps understandable because of usage. But the motor is so bullet-proof it's surprising Honda haven't been tempted to underwrite it. They say the standard XL will run for 3,000 miles without even minor servicing, so even at half that distance in racing miles, the XR owner has got to be on a bonus. How many sets of rings would you put in your PE in 1,500 miles?

The only thing that needs junking immediately is the handlebar. The standard ones bend like plastic piping and have been made very shallow to keep the front height down. A decent set of moto cross bars, particularly narrower ones, do a lot to improve the steering and control. The front end is high because of the 23 inch front wheel, and this is one of the few other points of contention. This has been the subject

of debate, and some criticism, by other testers. But it is our opinion that it is not the rim size, but the tyre which causes problems. The Honda Vari-grip treads, made by Bridgestone, and fitted as standard, are not the best for British conditions. They may work well in Southern California, but they don't cut through good old English goo like a traditional knobblly.

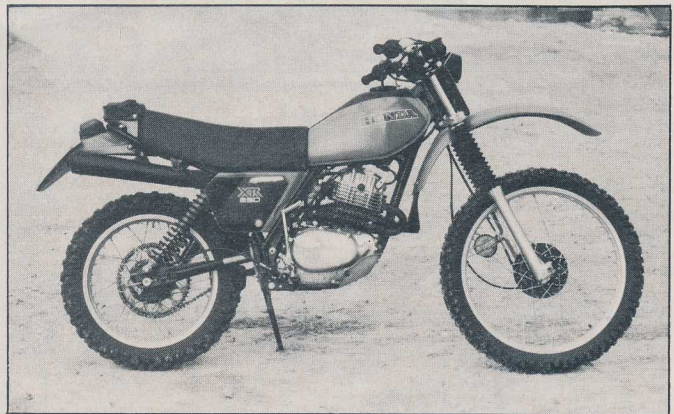
The big wheel performs well enough, and will hold its chosen line more positively, turn round things and roll over things better than a 21 inch. But the tyre lets it down, and at the moment there are no alternatives available in this country. Worse, a replacement 23 inch tyre costs about £49.

For all its size, the spokes seem to hold together under punishment and a sensible set of rims obviously helps.

The suspension is very good, with a healthy 9 inches of movement front and back. Not quite as much absolute movement as a PE, but enough, and well controlled, with the advantage of a surprisingly low seat height.

The rear units are 17 inches long, and angled at 45 degrees from the axle point. Alternative units, when they wear out, will be difficult to find without moving up to a full moto cross unit with reservoir, though this may not be a bad idea in itself.

On the other hand, if the owner finally decided he couldn't cope with the front tyre, and moved down to a 21 inch rim on the same hub, it would be sensible to go down to a shorter unit on the back to re-adjust the balance. Less movement, but this might not be more than a psychological disadvantage.

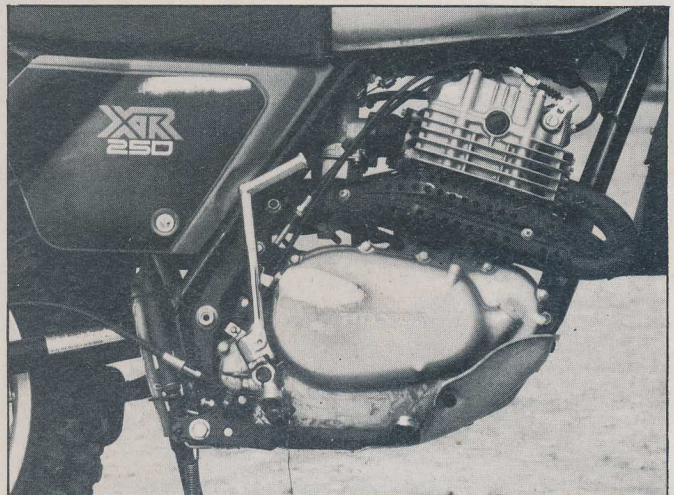


Above: XR250 displays profile of a true competition machine. Note alloy sump guard, moto-x style tank and rear-end tool-bag.

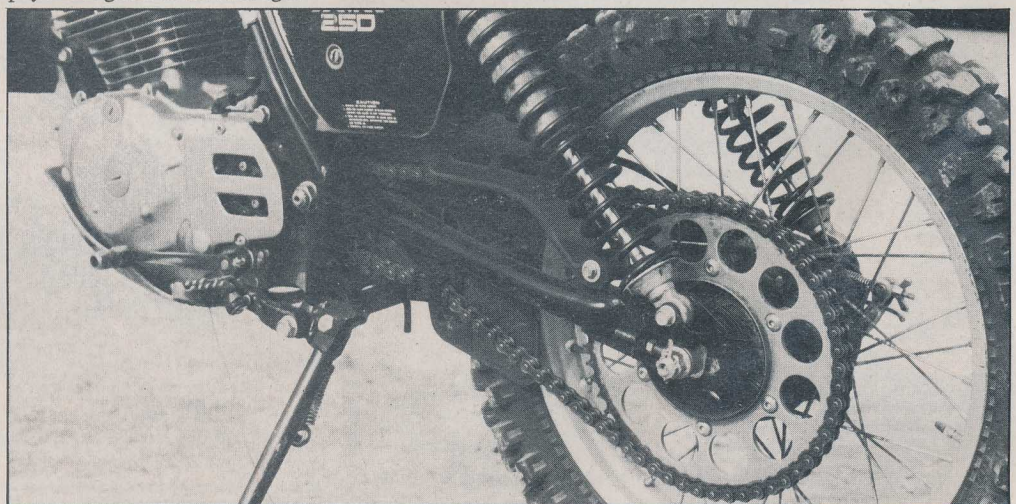
Below: Control systems are purely functional too, with all switchgear placed to one side.



Below: Compared to the cooking XL version, Honda's 250 is a whole different engine. 2000 more rpm at the top-end, a 30mm carb and smaller gearbox sprocket underline that fact.



Below: Rear end has a decent 9 inches of travel and Bridgestone Vari-grip boots, not ideal for British conditions, but good enough.



Overall the fittings and attachments on the Honda are good, and of a high standard. The front mudguard is broad, though cut short a bit at the back to clear the twin pipes. A flexible mudflap here would be a good idea to stop the motor clogging with gunge.

The front number plate and light is ugly but function-

al, and the tank, which will do most enduros without a top-up, has a nice big filler cap.

Attention to detail comes in with most of the nuts and bolts having collars to save you messing around with washers, and most bolts thread straight into frame fittings. Behind the seat there is a good-sized tool bag with a

Rear wheel antics are no problem on the Honda even though there's no peaks in the power band.





ON THE ROUGH

two-way zip, and the strong rear mudguard has a compact rubber-mounted light.

The gear lever and foot-brake have sprung-loaded tips, and a large alloy sump plate more than covers the vulnerable cases of the motor. It's obvious that Honda have done their homework and got most of the sums right.

One minor irritant is the right-side primary drive case which tends to rub the rider's boot by the kickstart – but there's not a lot you can do about that without re-designing the engine. The bulge houses the clutch arm, and shields the decompressor system that automatically lifts the exhaust valves when kicking the engine.

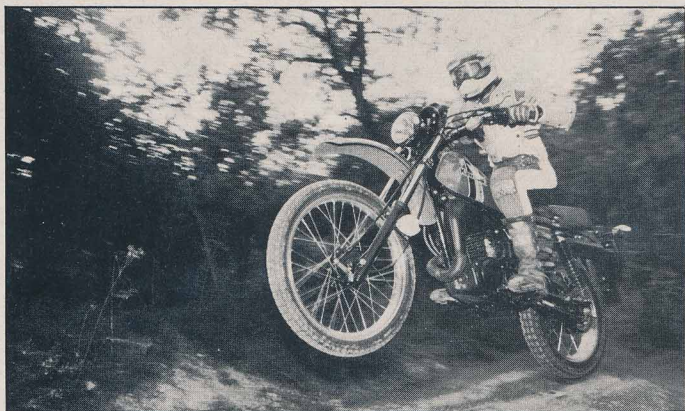
Not that the Honda's got a violent compression – it just helps it to be turned over with a quick prod equalling the ease of a two stroke. The difference is that it never

gases up, and it always starts.

The first impression of the XR is that it is a very tame motorcycle, compared to the current crop of enduro bikes. Many would consider that a blessing in itself, but more than that, it is the Honda's

Because of that, it's a far nicer bike to ride than the XR500, tested some issues back. It's predictable and controllable, and as a result, can probably be ridden as fast overall.

Honda only brought in a small batch at first, all were sold, and the next container load is due at the docks any day. It will be interesting if they also decide to bring in the XR185, currently available in the States. Along the same lines, but lighter, and with a six-speed box, it would complete a formidable lineup, and give Honda a serious contender in the PE-dominated clubman paddock.



	KE175D	Honda XR250
Price inc. VAT:	£689	£1114
Engine:	Reed valve two-stroke	Single overhead cam four valve four-stroke
Capacity:	174cc	249cc
Lubrication:	Auto pump	Wet sump
Comp. ratio:	6.5 to 1	9 to 1
Carburetion:	26mm Mikuni	30mm Keihin
Max. power:	19 bhp	24 bhp
Electrics:	CDI ignition 6v 6amp hr battery 35/35 w h/lamp	CDI ignition 6v AC generator 25/24 w h/lamp
Primary drive:	gear	gear
Gearbox:	five-speed	five-speed
Final drive:	428 chain	520 chain
Frame:	Single tube semi-cradle	Single tube open-cradle
Suspension:	Leading axle telescopic fork (f). Swinging arm with twin sprung dampers 5-pos. preload ad. (r).	Leading axle telescopic fork (f). Swinging arm with twin sprung dampers (r).
Tyres:	2.75 x 21 (f) 3.50 x 18 (r)	3.00 x 23 (f) 4.00 x 18 (r)
Brakes:	drum	drum

DIMENSIONS		
Wheelbase:	53.5 in	55 in
Seat height:	31 in	33 in
Grnd clrnce:	9.6 in	10 in
Overall width:	34.6 in	34.4 in
Weight:	229 lb dry	251 lb dry
Fuel capacity:	2 galls	2.2 galls
Importer/Manufacturer:	Kawasaki Motors UK Ltd, 748 Deal Ave, Trading Estate, Slough SL1 4SH.	Honda (UK) Ltd Power Road London W4.

OFF ROAD



RAMBLES

TRAIL RIDING IN DANGER

Politicians who confuse trail riding with moto-cross and enduros are the bane of those who use Britain's green lanes and a draft private member's bill to be presented during the current parliamentary sessions threatens to curtail our use of the ancient rights of way even further. The DoE's Wildlife & Countryside Bill will contain an amendment for the procedure of Definitive Map Reviews which can alter the status of green lanes or Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPPs). Currently the Reviews are organised on a five yearly basis and any change of status, such as downgrading a RUPP to a Bridleway which would prohibit the use of motor-vehicles, cannot be sanctioned until protests and proposals have been heard, which often means a Public Enquiry. This is a costly, time consuming process which the DoE propose to circumvent with a system of "random" reviews whereby a County Council could re-classify any of the lanes under their jurisdiction as and when they wanted to, dealing with objections on a piecemeal basis.

This is an invidious item of legislation because it would make it far more difficult for trail riding organisations to lodge protests and also because it depends on the interpretation of individual County Inspectors as to the ideal status of the lanes involved. The present system, although cumbersome for the councils to operate, at least has a lucid procedure which allows all the parties concerned to indulge in some sort of dialogue as to how the lanes are and should be used.

As Richard Marshall of the Trail Riders Fellowship says in *Trials & Moto-Cross News* (14/9/79), "They (the local authorities) want to remove any vehicular rights which exist, from all definitive Bridleways, whether reclassified RUPPs or not.

"At the stroke of a pen, this would stop riders from using all dual status bridleways/unclassified roads in England and Wales. It is estimated that 25% of all green lanes would be lost. . . for example Nottinghamshire would be left with virtually no lanes open to motorcyclists."

Trail riders who are concerned about this devolution of the power to prohibit them from using RUPPs and green-lanes and the muddled thinking behind such a proposal, are advised to write to their MP and explain that trail riding is a *recreation*, not a sport, and that the use of existing rights of way is a fundamental freedom.

BURDON'S BUSHES

UK Moto-Villa importers **John Burdon** are offering swinging arm bush kits for early and late model Bultaco Sherpas and Pursangs, Montesa 247s and UKRs and certain Ossas. The kits come complete with hardened steel pins and special highly durable bushing material and are priced at just £10.50, plus 80p post and packing, from Frankfield Rd., Great Ayton, North Yorkshire.

FINER FANTIC

The 125cc **Fantic Trials** tested in our December '78 issue has undergone several changes over the year, the most significant of these being the optional 175 conversion offered by Barron Eurotrade, the Fantic importers. Now the factory itself is producing a 156cc engined version in response to the obvious demand for more cubes and they've done this by increasing the bore from 55.2 to 62mm whilst leaving the stroke at 52mm. The six-speed gearbox is retained and the chassis is basically