

WR500

YAMAHA UNLEASHES ITS RADICAL NEW SECRET WEAPONS:

# '91 WR500 & WR200!

ALL COLOR ISSUE!

DIRT BIKE

# DIRT BIKE

WPS 34355

THE #1 AUTHORITY OF DIRT BIKES FOR OVER 20 YEARS!

- '91 RACE TESTS:
- HONDA CR500
  - SUZUKI RM125
  - KTM 250MX
  - ATK 406

RIDING THE WORLD'S FASTEST DR350!

NOVEMBER 1990

\$2.50  
CANADA \$3.00  
UK £1.60

ATT'N RETAILER: PLEASE DISPLAY UNTIL NOV. 20



ISSN 0364-1546



## DUAL-SPORT SHOW-DOWN:

DRS vs. XT vs.  
KLR vs. XLV vs.  
NX vs. HUNKY!



WR200



**WARNING:** Much of the action depicted in this magazine is potentially dangerous. Virtually all of the riders seen in our photos are experienced experts or professionals. Do not attempt to duplicate any stunts that are beyond your own capabilities. Always wear the appropriate safety gear. *Dirt Bike* does all of its testing and photography legally on public land, or private land with permission from the owner(s), and we abide by the local laws concerning vehicle registration and muffler/spark arrester requirements. We are not responsible for quality of aftermarket accessories we use.

*DIRT BIKE* Magazine (ISSN 0364-1546), November '90, is published monthly by Daisy/Hi-Torque Publishing Company, Inc., with editorial offices at 10600 Sepulveda Blvd., Mission Hills, CA 91345. Subscriptions \$15.98 for 12 issues (one year). Canada add \$5 per year, and all other foreign add \$6 per year for additional postage. Copyright © 1990 by Daisy/Hi-Torque Publishing Company, Inc. All rights reserved. Nothing in this magazine may be reprinted in whole or in part, by mimeograph or any other means, without the express permission of the publisher. Contributors: Photographic submissions must be 5x7 or 8x10 glossy black and white, or 35mm and larger color slides. Please mark each photo with owner's name and address. Manuscripts should be typewritten. Unsolicited contributions, manuscripts, photographs and illustrations must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Unless special arrangements are made in advance, all published material becomes the sole property of Daisy/Hi-Torque Publishing Company, Inc. The publisher does not assume responsibility for unsolicited material. Second class postage paid at San Fernando, CA 91340, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *DIRT BIKE* Magazine, P.O. Box 9502, Mission Hills, CA 91395-9502. Printed in USA.

## BIKES

- 18 SUZUKI RM125  
A different kind of sticker shock
- 30 YAMAHA WR200 & WR500  
You knew. We knew. Now Yamaha delivers.
- 32 HONDA CR500R  
Finally, mortals can ride Open class
- 36 ATK 406  
Simplicity was never so complex
- 74 KTM 250MX  
What's "Mint Condition" really mean?

## COMPETITION

- 12 WILD & WOOLLY AT WASHOUGAL  
National 125s: not for rookies only
- 56 THE FIVE FASTEST MEN IN AMERICA  
Tall tales from the top 250-class riders

## TECHNICAL

- 21 UNLOCKING THE RM125  
Secrets even the factory doesn't know
- 40 THE TRUTH ABOUT COUNTERSHAFT  
BRAKES Pros and cons from the pros
- 76 AUSTRIAN CUSTOMS  
Tips for a well-behaved KTM 250MX

## FEATURES

- 35 OFF-ROAD WITH THE CR500R  
Firing Honda's big gun in the desert
- 46 *DIRT BIKE'S* DUAL-SPORT SCALE  
Rating the 350-to-650cc D/S bikes
- 62 INSIDE THE ISDE DR350s  
Suzuki's battle plan for taking Sweden
- 70 PROFESSOR HANNAH ON ENDUROS  
You're never too fast to learn

## DEPARTMENTS

- 8 FROM THE SADDLE
- 10 CHECKPOINT
- 12 BITS & PIECES
- 16 RIDERS WRITE
- 82 MR. KNOW-IT-ALL
- 94 RICK'S PITBOARD
- 98 NEW PRODUCTS
- 102 CRASH & BURN

**ON THE COVER:** Why didn't Jeff Ward win the 250 championship? He tells all on page 56, while Yamaha's new enduro surprises are on page 30. Wardy photo by Chris Hultner. Cover design by DeWest, separations by Valley Film.

**Rick:** Ron Lawson looked me straight in the eye, forced a smile and lied through his teeth: "Hunk, you'll love it." I was suspicious already. "We're going to have the whole staff go on a dual-sport ride and we want you to go with us."

Ron is the new editor of *Dirt Bike*, and while I'm sure he meant well, I was also sure he didn't have a clue about how much I hate dual-purpose bikes. Well, maybe not "hate"—perhaps "detest" is a better word.

Some clarification is in order. You see, I have ridden literally hundreds of dual-purpose bikes over the last 20 years, and in the process I have lost more skin, tweaked more

knees and been in an advanced state of fear more times than I care to think about.

Am I too opinionated about this?


Yes.

However, by being old and crusty, I am allowed to be this way and make no apologies for my stance.

**Ron:** Tim warned me. Joe warned me. Even Rondo advised against it. What, I thought, could be more fun and less harmful than inviting the Hunk along on our dual-sport ride? I mean, the worst thing that could happen is that he would have a rotten time, right?

Wrong. The worst thing that could happen is that we would have to *listen* to him having a rotten time. If you never experienced Hunky in full gripe, then just imagine what Bob Hannah acted like when he heard that they colorized all the old John Wayne films—you want to keep your distance.

In truth, what was there to complain about here? Out of the seven bikes, he was bound to find one he liked. There were the two 350s, the Yamaha and the Suzuki, which were certainly better than most of the pure dirt bikes of the '70s. If they didn't have enough power for the street sections then there were the big bikes. The Suzuki DR650S, the Yamaha elec-

A photograph showing three riders on dual-sport motorcycles on a dirt trail. The rider in the foreground is on a blue and white Suzuki DR650S. The rider in the middle is on a blue and white Yamaha. The rider in the background is on a white and blue motorcycle. They are all wearing helmets and riding gear. The background shows a vast, hilly landscape under a clear sky.

*Riding is riding; it's always fun. On dual-sport bikes you just get to ride more places, more often.*

tric-start XT600 and the Kawasaki KLR650 all are powerful, although street-oriented, motorcycles. Finally, there were the two Hondas, which were complete street bikes: the now-discontinued (but still stocked and available) NX650 and the twin-cylinder Transalp. To be honest, I really didn't expect the Hunk to like those.

**Rick:** There's a certain sense of satisfaction about gassing up a bunch of shiny new bikes on a cool weekday morning, knowing that you're going to be riding while everyone else is trundling off to work—even if the bikes are overweight, underpowered and half useless.

The first part of the ride was all pavement. It only took 20 minutes before the riders started squirming around in their saddles. The smaller bikes started numbing hands and the early stages of "monkey butt" began setting in. All of the riders were happy to arrive at the Gorman/Hungry Valley riding area. Dare I say it? Riding a D/S bike at legal speed is boring. I, personally, would rather cover that highway in a nice car with the air-conditioner on and a Willie Nelson tape playing.

**Ron:** There are only so many ways to deal with long straight sections of pavement. One: you can sit in a Buick, surrounded by your own personal environment, thereby avoiding any possible contact with the outside world. Two: You can ride a D/S motorcycle and enjoy the ride as much as possible. The roads up to the Gorman area in Southern California are rugged, mountainous and twisting. Even the freeway sections are sur-

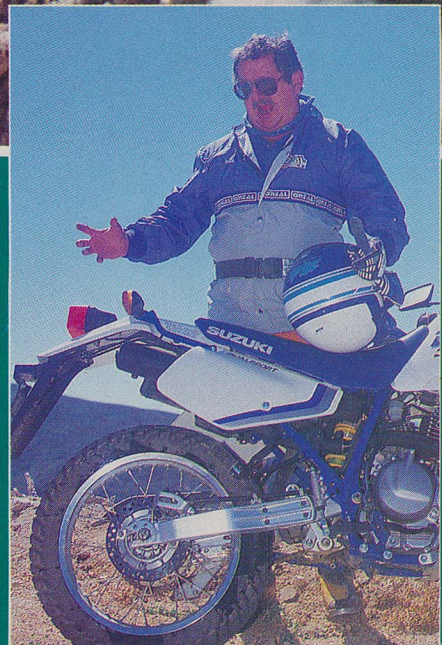


**DUAL VIEW & DUAL SPORT**

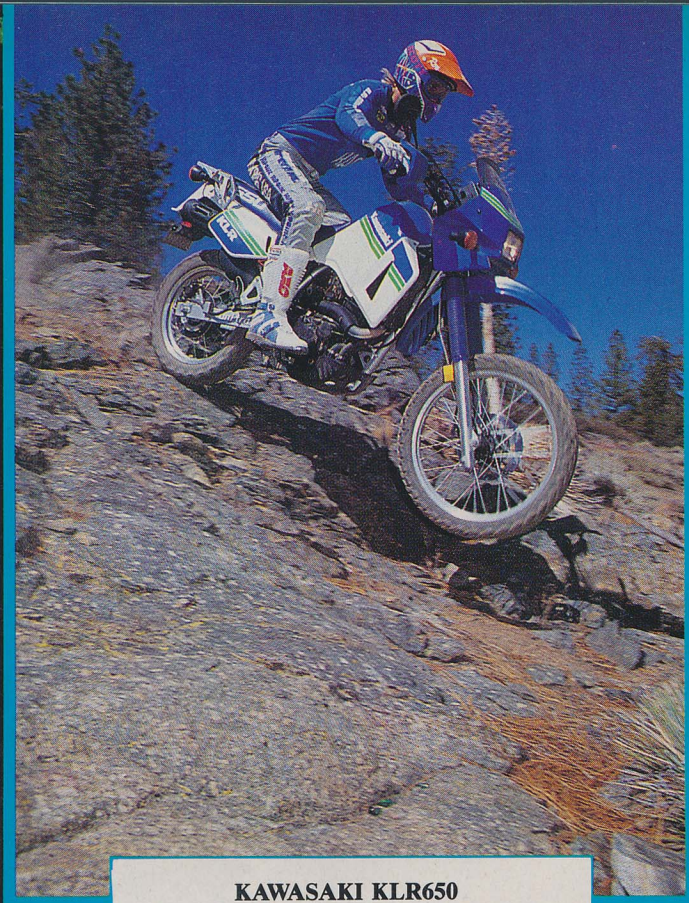
# FROM FREEWAYS TO FIRE ROADS & BACK!

*Does street-legal  
mean dirt boring?*

By Rick Sieman or Ron Lawson, depending on which parts you read



**"You could train a chicken to ride one!"  
Super Hunky's standard comment on dual-  
sport bikes. Or is that ATVs?**



**KAWASAKI KLR650**

It's a fun bike on a fire road, but other than that, keep the KLR on the street. It's not as powerful as the big Suzuki, but the Kawasaki's liquid-cooled, electric-start motor is super-smooth.

*Dirt Bike Dual-Sport Scale: 20% dirt, 80% street.*



**YAMAHA XT600**

The electric starter has become one of our favorite things. The new XT has the magic button and it feels right in the dirt, but it doesn't have enough power to justify all that weight.

*Dirt Bike Dual-Sport Scale: 40% dirt, 60% street.*



## DUAL SPORT

rounded by stark cliffs and endless vistas.

The D/S bikes did their job well on the pavement. They took us through all that, giving us the opportunity to take in the scenery and be a part of the surroundings. Everyone (with one possible exception) seemed to have a good time.

Along the way we passed one truck full of dirt bikes. The passenger was asleep and the driver was staring blankly ahead, his brain completely shut off aside from some very basic motor functions. They reminded me of the astronauts in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, who were cryogenically frozen while they were traveling through space, to be thawed out when they got to their destination. These guys in the truck are going to wake up from their suspended animation and be a few hours older, I thought, while we've spent those hours riding. They're missing out.

I think they were even listening to a Willie Nelson tape.

**Rick:** Once we got off the regular roads, it was as if a weight had been lifted from our shoulders. No more highway patrolmen, speed limits or good behavior. A few impromptu drag races broke out. The DR650, Transalp and KLR650 were the horsepower kings of the group, but they were still nothing compared to a good 500 motocrosser, which will change the rotation of the earth if it can get enough traction. Once the goofing around stopped and the riding began, something else became obvious. The 350s



### SUZUKI DR650S

It's bigger than some small countries, all right, but it has gobs of power and works surprisingly well. We only wish the monstrous DR has an electric starter.

*Dirt Bike Dual-Sport Scale: 40% dirt, 60% street.*



## DUAL SPORT

The secret in enjoying a D/S ride is in the company you keep. If you spend too much time worrying about someone beating you to the top of the mountain on a full-on dirt bike, you'll make yourself miserable. The truth is that it's just as challenging and just as much fun to climb a trail in 20 minutes on a D/S bike as it is to do the same section in 15 minutes on an RMX. As long as there are no RMXs around to spoil the party, the dual-sport bikes are in their own universe, where all the hills are steeper and all the traction looser than they are in the regular world. That universe has some really nice things, too. Like electric starting. Like super-soft suspension that makes rocky, slow sections actually *easier* than they would be on an outright dirt bike.

**Rick:** Retrospect is a wonderful thing. After the group meandered back to the start point, the *DB* crew unwound, slammed down a few cold ones and recapped the whole day. We touched on the pros and cons of each bike, which ones we'd buy, and so forth, and then a strange thought crossed my alleged mind. A few minutes later I heard myself asking if I could borrow the Suzuki DR350 for maybe a month or two. Or three. Considering that all I'd done for a full day was whine and moan about how much I hated dual-sport bikes, they pressed me for details.

Here's the deal: I travel in Baja a lot and I see neat little trails heading off to . . . who knows where? It would be great to just sort of explore these narrow trails with a friend. The ideal tool would be a dual-sport bike.

Maybe the road you want to explore is in the mountains of the East, or the vast expanses of the Western deserts, or the sugar-

### HONDA NX650

The NX isn't officially in Honda's line anymore, but dealers still have lots of new ones. It has a fantastic motor trapped in a really weird, plastic-shrouded chassis.

*Dirt Bike Dual-Sport Scale: 10% dirt, 90% street.*

were gone in a flash, leaving the big bikes eating dust. The Suzuki 650 managed the two-track trails slightly better than the other big singles, but the Transalp was almost comical.

After a half-hour of dirt roads, we hit the base of a beautiful mountain trail, gingerly crossed a shallow stream and started up the

hillside. As long as the surface was hard-packed, I suppose the bikes worked okay, but when slick spots were encountered, the little "knobettes" became useless. You may as well paint the rims black and leave the tires hanging on the garage wall. Do yourself a favor. If you spend any time off-road, mount a pair of knobbies.

The 35-mile loop led to trails over the 8000-foot mark and a pause at the top let the riders rest and enjoy some truly spectacular scenery. I had to admit, privately, this part of the ride was almost fun.

**Ron:** Super Hunky was softening. Usually, you can tell his attitude by the color of his cigar smoke. When it's dark brown, stay away. When it's light blue, that means he's having a good time. It's kind of like when a dog has a wet nose, that sort of thing. If he had had a cigar at the top of Alamo Mountain, I think he would have been puffing blue smoke.

### HONDA TRANSALP

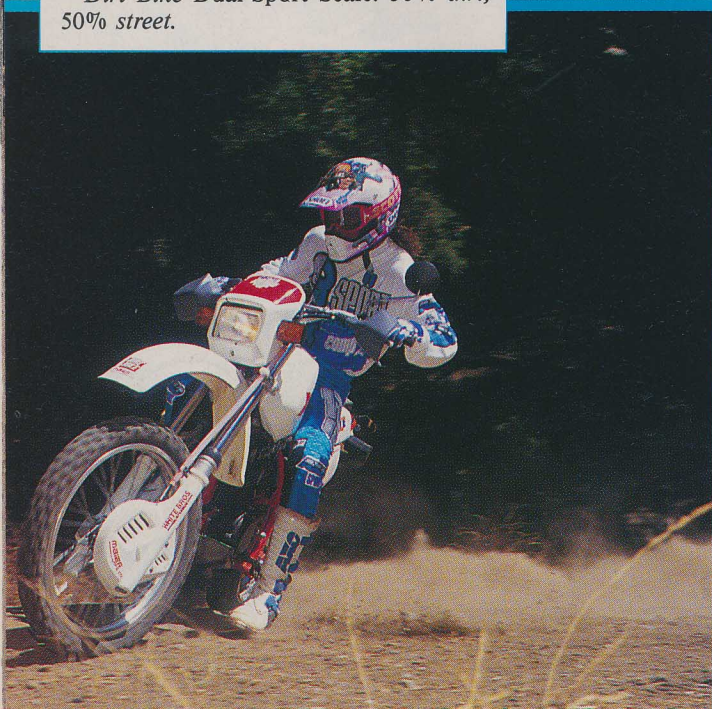
Believe it or not, you *can* take the V-twin Transalp off-road and even have fun doing it. Just be prepared to work real hard—and stick to dirt roads when you do.

*Dirt Bike Dual-Sport Scale: 10% dirt, 90% street.*

### YAMAHA XT350

Not much has happened to the XT350 in the last few years. Even if it is a little dated, though, it won't be too far behind the new Suzuki on any given trailride.

*Dirt Bike Dual-Sport Scale: 50% dirt, 50% street.*



## DUAL SPORT

sand trails of the Southeast. As much as I hate to admit it, a D/S bike is the only machine that can get the job done.

**Ron:** Okay, so we didn't totally reform Rick's attitude about dual-sport bikes. When a Super Hunky opinion is etched, it tends to last longer than the half-life of nuclear waste, but the fact that he referred to the Suzuki DR350S as his favorite, instead of calling it the bike he hated least, makes me believe that maybe, just maybe, he enjoyed himself more than he let on. He actually asked to borrow the DR for a while, making up some cockamamie story about wanting to explore trails in Baja.

I think that somewhere inside he decided that dirt bikes are fun because, among other things, they remove limitations; they allow you to do things that you couldn't otherwise do. The biggest difference is that dual-purpose bikes don't have to blast through those limitations. They can ride right around them. So in the case of dual-sport bikes versus Super Hunky, we'll call it a draw for now, but don't be surprised if you catch a glimpse of a large figure having an absolute blast on a DR350 in some secret Sunday riding area. Be forewarned, though; he'll deny ever having been there. □



### SUZUKI DR350S

The midsize DR-S is the best of the batch on the trail, but still, soft suspension and power make it a little more street-oriented than we hoped.

*Dirt Bike Dual-Sport Scale: 60% dirt, 40% street.*

