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2000 XR



Big Red vs. the Rocky Mountains

By The rock-bashing DIRT BIKE staff

Although Honda's XR line is intended for woods work, the XR400R has its roots more in the deep sand whoops of California, Michigan and Florida than other areas. Bruce Ogilvie and the Honda testing crew did extensive suspension testing in the Southern California desert before production began in '95, and the new 400 was introduced to the press in Michigan. We loved the bike in those conditions, but XR guru Scott Summers felt the suspension was too stiff for rockier, more eastern conditions. So, we hooked up with Fay Myers Honda in Denver to do a special test of the 2000 model in the

Colorado Rockies. Not only would the suspension be put to the ultimate test; the high altitudes would put the 400's engine setting to task as well.

The Fay Myers crew converted the new XR400 into a minimalist dual-sport (see "Bits & Pieces") since we'd be riding on some jeep trails, but the testing would occur on some of the planet's best single-track, between Taylor Park and Crested Butte, Colorado. As a bonus, a week of rain made these trails muddy, slick and nasty, and Malcolm Smith would be showing us some of his secret trails in the area. Yeah!

400R



Excellent throttle response, a short wheelbase and good torque make the XR400 a wheelie machine worthy of Doug Domokos. The problem comes when you're on a steep, technical hill and don't want it to wheelie.

Having stiff suspension holds the XR400 up better in deep ruts, and it lets you leap further off of the first rock, root or lip. The shock does a great job of keeping things in line.

2000 XR 400R



Bold new pigment: Honda wheelies towards the 21st century by making its dirt bikes red again. The XR400R is unchanged, except for the blood-red plastic and BNGs, but that's a good thing. Everything that worked in '99 carries into '00.

STIFF VERSUS SLICK

On the greasy, rocky and root-infested trails of the Gunnison/San Isabel National Forests, the 43mm conventional Showas proved to be the weak link in the chassis/suspension package. The fork worked great on big whoops and when jumping water bars. It even did a good job on small ripples and

rocks in the trail, but the midsized stuff gave us the most trouble on really slick trail. Larger rocks and roots would send the front wheel off-line, forcing a correction or two. We quickly adapted, though, and learned to help the fork over the hits with throttle and weighting. Or we'd steer around the major hits by riding the very edges of the trail.

FIVE THINGS WE LIKE

- The radial four-valve head engine has a manual decompressor for pop-starting on the trail.
- Aside from wiring the grips, this bike is truly trail-ready. Any trail.
- Super-comfortable ergonomics with a thick, soft seat promote long days in the saddle.
- A short wheelbase provides nimble handling in tight stuff, yet it's stable.
- Easily converted to street-legality for USFS jeep trails, and the pipe passes the government sound test.

FIVE THINGS WE DISLIKE

- Seat-tank junction and shape prevent moving forward for turns.
- Fork flexes in ruts and spikes in midstroke on fast, midsized hits.
- Although strong by OEM standards the stock steel handlebar has too much sweep.
- It could use a hot-start button like the WR400F.
- While the XR600 has a tool kit/bag, the 400 and 250 don't.

After 100 miles on tight, gnarly single track, the fork had made our wrists a little sore. We would have the fork revalved by Factory Connection if we were going to ride exclusively on rocky trail, but the fork proved decent on slick mud, rocks and roots. Backing off the compression clicker helped the ride on trail junk but made the fork bottom on the erosion bars. We had a '99 KLX300 along, too, and it soaked up everything without requiring any special riding technique or tire placement on the same sections.

Out back, the shock worked great in all situations. It provided great hook-up on the slickest clay muck imaginable, yet it isolated the pilot from the smallest trail junk and let us hit the water bars like Jeremy. And it soaked up everything we threw at it—from greasy roots to rocks the size of Sarah Michele Gellar's head. It would only deflect when we'd hit a root or ruts at a sharp angle. We didn't feel it needed revalving like the fork. Heck, we didn't even feel the need to spin clickers. Good stuff.

STEEP VERSUS CORKED

Unlike other off-road four-strokes, the XR400R can be made to run well with the stock muffler, which is a real benefit when dealing with other trail users. And it makes it easier to sneak up on Bambi. But would the bike be able to scale the goat trails that Malcolm loves? Yes! Although the four-honey felt more like an XR250 above 10,000 feet, it scrambled and clawed its way to the top of every peak save one. This particular trail was topped with deep loam and was

2000 XR 400R

extremely slick. Traction (or lack of it) prevented us from conquering the hill, not power.

Stone stock, the motor was unstoppable, as long as we kept the throttle cracked. It would claw over rock gardens at low revs or drift the rear end out on jeep trails at speed. It would wheelie

over logs or float over exposed roots, as directed by the throttle. Doing wheelies over deadfall was harder at higher altitudes, so it took a harder tug on the bars or more body-weight transfer (a Lump specialty) to loft the front wheel. The bike always started easily, carbureted well and responded to commands as if it

had ESP. We abused the clutch mercilessly, and it never caused any grief. Overall, the XR400 has probably the best trail motor of all time—tractable on ice yet meaty on moto sections.

BITS & PIECES

- Fay Myers rejettied the XR400 for 6000-foot altitude by going to a 138 main and dropping the needle one notch. This jetting was way rich for 12,500 peaks but good for 6000-9000 feet.

- For sea-level, richen the jetting slightly, going from a 142 main and 52 pilot to a 145 and 55, respectively. The



GPS and videocams help the enthusiasts at Fay Myers, COHVCO and L&M Productions map local trails and steer the riding public towards new and breathtaking opportunities. This is but one of Malcolm's "secret" trails.

• It's pretty easy to tell which dealers are only in it for the money and which are true enthusiasts themselves. Putting Fay Myers Motorcycle World in this latter category is an understatement. In an effort to expand and promote off-road riding opportunities in Colorado, Fay Myers' crew started L&M Productions, which creates motorcycle and ATV trail guides and videos (along with Idaho trail maps/-videos.) Not only do these products help new or visiting riders find the best OHV spots in Colorado, they act as trail inventories and project trail-use figures to land managers and lawmakers.

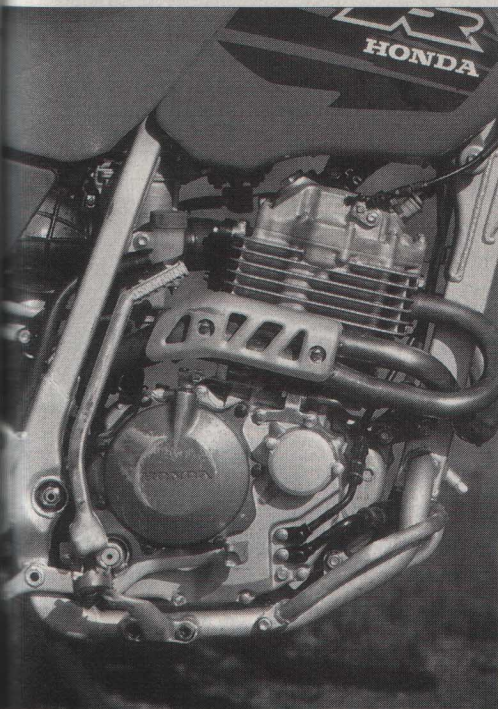
Simply put, trail guide and video sales provide hard numbers that show the popularity of the state's various trail systems. L&M Productions provides those numbers to Fay Myers' sister entity COHVCO, so that COHVCO hot-shot Jerry Abboud can then go to the capital building and promote OHV opportunities before Congress. Every state with a national forest should look to the way COHVCO sets up volunteer programs with USFS managers and fights closures. COHVCO is on the front lines in the latest eco-battle—the road moratorium and its affect on access to public lands.

"Colorado remains one of the finest opportunities for OHV fun, challenge and adventure in the United States," says Jerry Abboud, "but preservationist pressure to close roads and trails has intensified so much in the past three years that timber, mining, grazing, oil and gas industries have been largely replaced by motorized recreation as an 'evil.'" Want to avoid massive closures? Want to continue to ride the Colorado Rockies? The Colorado OHV Coalition, through the Western States Legal Foundation, recently sued the Forest Service in Federal District Court for arbitrary and capricious action on the Routt National Forest. And the most recent proposal for the White River NF seeks to close some of the best riding in Colorado. We're fighting those closures too—there isn't an inch of trail left that's not worth saving. Want to help COHVCO hold the line and stop closures? Send contributions to the COHVCO Legal Defense Fund at 2025 W. Alameda, Denver, CO 80223. Or call (303) 539-5010.

L&M Productions is at 2015 Alameda and (303)77-RIDER. Trail guides I and II are \$14.99 each, while videos go for \$19.99. Even if you don't plan to ride the rockies, L&M and COHVCO can help you map and protect trails in your area. Give them a call! •

COLORADO OHV COALITION

*Putting OHV horsepower
to the ground*



1999 HONDA XR400R



Although the XR400 motor gains a lot of top-end power with an aftermarket pipe, woods riders should keep the quiet stock muffler. Power delivery, clutch action and transmission gear ratios are all sweet.

stock A16A needle can be left in the stock (middle) position with the muffler and airbox inserts removed.

- Since we'd be in first and second gear most of the time anyway, Fay Myers installed a 14-tooth sprocket (15/45 is standard).

- Stock, the XR400R goes 65 miles before hitting reserve. Lower the carb's float level 1mm, and that number jumps to 90 miles without affecting performance on rough ground.

- The 400 comes with 0.40Kg/mm fork and 9.5Kg/mm shock springs in its Showas, with the rear actually being lighter than the XR250's rate. The extra high-speed compression damping at each end holds the bike up out of ruts better than the 600 or 250.

- Believe it or not, Y2K XRs come with dual-element taillight bulbs, so you can simply wire the receptacle to a rear brake-light switch (Triumph #2023120-T0301) and you're closer to street legality. Fay Myers also added a hi-lo switch to the stock headlight and have adapted a 6V Honda horn (#38100-110-671) to run with a 9-volt battery and an extra kill switch (#35130-MN1-670). Add an Acerbis folding dual-sport mirror, and head to the DMV for a license plate!

- We also used Acerbis Rally Pro handguards for knuckle protection.

TOO WILD TO TAME?

Although we couldn't duplicate the wet leaf- and moss-covered limestone of

Tennessee and Kentucky, the rain-slickened single track at Taylor Park provided a great testing ground for the new XR400. While the fork was unruly enough to cause complaints, it never caused a face plant. The shock and engine provided excellent traction on surfaces too slick to walk across, and the chassis was extremely nimble and forgiving. The 400 snaked through tight trees and slithered over nasty bogs like

Suspension:

Front Showa 43mm conventional cartridge, adj. comp./reb., 11.0" (279mm) travel

Rear Pro-Link, Showa aluminum piggyback shock, adj. prel./comp./reb., 11.8" (300mm) travel

Country of origin Japan
Suggested retail price \$5299

Distributor/manufacturer:
 American Honda Motor Corp.
 1919 Torrance Blvd.
 Torrance, CA 90501-2746
 (310)783-2000

Engine type Air-cooled, 4-valve, SOHC 4-stroke
Displacement 397cc
Bore & stroke 85.0mm x 70.0mm
Carburetion 36mm Keihin
Fuel tank capacity 2.5 gal. (8.5L)
Lighting coil Yes
Spark arrestor Yes
EPA/CARB legal Yes
Running weight w/no fuel 264 lb.
Wheelbase 56.1" (1425mm)
Rake/trail 25.2@/3.8"
Ground clearance 12.2" (310mm)
Tire size and type:
Front 80/100-21 Dunlop K490
Rear 110/100-18 Dunlop K695

it was born there, not 1000 miles away in some SoCal desert hell-hole. The comfortable layout and excellent control package made the bike an excellent choice for taming the Rocky Mountains, and its ability to run so well with the stock exhaust should earn it the USFS squeal of approval.

Think of it this way - what you didn't spend on a pipe can go to a fork revalve and minimalist dual-sport hardware. □