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**RACE TESTING THE
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• **HONDA XR630**
• **HUSKY 610!**

**FAST & FUN SNOW BLASTING:
DON'T MISS THE YEAR'S BEST RIDING!**

**THE 10 WORST BIKES EVER:
IS ONE LURKING IN YOUR GARAGE?**



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ON THE COVER: Ron Lawson, Troy Welty, Shaun Wynn, Jim Buntin and Chuck Dempsy wring out the 1991 Open-classes at El Mirage dry lake. Photo by Chris Hultner, cover design by DeWest, and color separations by Valley Film.

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.

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New life for
old faithful

BORN AGAIN

By the DIRT BIKE Staff

People are strange. If you mounted a chunk of broken glass on a ring and flashed it around like it was something special, no one would be impressed. You could even call it a cubic zirconium, show it on the *Home Shopping Club* for a solid hour of prime time and still people will just yawn and switch the channel to old *Flipper* reruns. If that chunk of glass just happens to be a diamond, however, it suddenly becomes a priceless thing of rare beauty. A diamond might not be any shinier, but it's worth more because . . . well, because people *think* it's worth more.

People are the same way about motorcycles. Exotic four-strokes are the rage of the '90s. Riders want them so badly that they'll pay upwards of \$7000 for one, as long as it's the latest, trickiest thing.



Stock, the XR has all the power a trail rider will ever need. With the competition kit, the Honda has all the power a racer will ever want.



**HONDA XR600
w/competition kit**

Engine type	.....	Air-cooled 4-stroke
Displacement	.....	628cc (591, stock)
Bore and stroke	.....	100mm x 80mm (97 x 80, stock)
Carburetion	.....	40mm Keihin
Fuel tank capacity	.....	2.6 gal.
Gearing	.....	14/48
Lighting coil	.....	Yes
Spark arrester	.....	Yes
Green sticker legal in stock form	.....	Yes
Claimed dry weight	.....	263 lb.
Running weight with no fuel	.....	281 lb.
Wheelbase	.....	57.0 in. (145mm)
Rake/trail	.....	28°/4.6 in.
Ground clearance	.....	13.2 in. (33.1 mm)
Seat height	.....	37.0 in. (94.0mm)

Tire size and type:

Front	.....	80/100-21 IRC VE32
Rear	.....	110/100-18 IRC VE37

Suspension:

Front	.....	Showa cartridge, adj. comp., 11.6 in. travel
Rear	.....	Showa aluminum piggyback, adj. reb./comp., 11.2 in travel

Country of origin

Japan

Suggested retail price

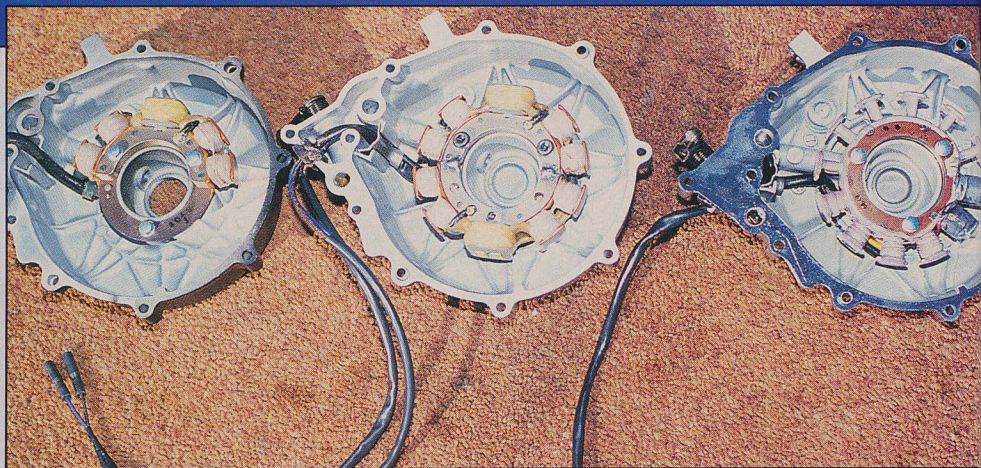
\$3698 + \$998

Distributor/manufacturer:

American Honda Motor Corp.
1919 Torrance Blvd.
Torrance, CA 90501-2746
(213) 783-2000

PARTS REPLACEMENT COST

Piston	.....	\$55.88
Rings	.....	35.47
Clutch plate (drive)	.....	7.49
Clutch plate (driven)	.....	6.18
Front sprocket	.....	14.33
Rear sprocket	.....	56.58
Front brake pads	.....	20.92
Rear brake pads	.....	22.52



Honda was concerned about the ignition failure that plagued some Baja race efforts, so the old Hitachi unit (left) was replaced with one made by ND (right). DIRT BIKE's special Baja racer came with two separate ignitions (center)—if one failed, we would just plug in a new wire. It never failed.



floor, it's already the most complete thumper you can buy—you don't have to fix anything.

In the case of this particular XR, it was made even trickier with Honda's own competition kit. That adds \$998 to the cost, but when it's all put together you still have a lot less invested in the XR than you would in the latest high-fashion exotic motorcycle—and it's a lot better bike.

NEW STUFF: WELCOME TO 1986

This year the standard XR gets a lot of technology that has long been available but deemed too expensive for the mass-market thumper. For example, the XR finally has a cartridge fork. It's the same basic fork that the CR250 and 500 came with back in 1987, which, Honda bookkeepers say, is the most expensive fork that Showa ever made for Honda. Front wheel travel on the XR is a little less than it was on the old CR, primarily to keep the seat height down.

In the rear it's the same story: the new XR gets a tried-and-true Showa shock that saw service on the CR line. It has a fairly large body and full adjustability. Again, rear wheel travel is less than that of the MXers. Oh, well.

Also new: the XR leaps into the mid-'80s with a rear disc brake. In past years Honda baffled the world by making the rear drum brake smaller and weaker. Strange logic. Now the XR not only has a disc, but it's a disc that works and doesn't fade away no matter how badly it's abused. This year Honda also made the swingarm shorter and the footpegs wider.

EXTRA CREDIT

Honda's performance kit consists of a larger piston that boosts the displacement to 628cc and hikes the compression ratio from 9.0:1 to 10.6:1. There's also a high-performance cam, taller primary gearing (a larger primary gear and a smaller clutch-hub gear) and some odds and ends like heavy-duty clutch springs and new jets. The kit *doesn't* include a megaphone exhaust (we bolted on a SuperTrapp for \$149.95) or a high-flow air filter (a K&N sells for \$36.25).

What's it all do? It makes the Honda rip. The standard XR is okay as a play bike but just too sluggish for race use. With the kit the bike gains horsepower everywhere. That is the advantage of increased displacement: you don't have to sacrifice low-end for top-end or vice versa. You can have it all. What's better yet, the XR retains its manners. It will not ping on pump gas despite the relatively high compression ratio—and it'll idle all day at heartbeat-slow rpm. The kit is mostly pluses with few minuses. Okay, okay, the clutch pull is a little harder with the heavier springs, and sometimes the hot-rodded XR can be harder to start than the stocker. Compared to most big four-strokes (aside from an electric-start ATK), both the stocker and the kitted bike virtually start themselves.

To put the XR630's horsepower in perspective, a stock XR won't quite accelerate with a CR250R. With the kit, the XR can out-pull any 250cc two-stroke, but still isn't a match for a good-running 500cc MXer.

The kitted bike will trounce a stock ATK 604, but you need to remember that an ATK 604 is really only 560cc in displacement. Slap the 600 kit and an 860 cam in the ATK and it will have more peak power than the XR, but the Honda still will have more grunt and smoother power.

WHO'S THE BOSS?

When you're riding a big motorcycle like an XR, you have to pay attention. It's a powerful, heavy motorcycle—always has been—but with the changes in suspension and the shorter swingarm, the XR is much less intimidating than it used to be. In fact, riding the new XR makes you realize just how bad the suspension was on the old XR. Many of those scary things that you blamed on the bike's rather hefty weight are gone, despite the fact that the bike is no lighter. The XR no longer is bad medicine in whoops. In the past you would make better time with a stock XR if you went three miles out of your way to avoid any section that had more than three bumps within sight of one another. We always thought that was because a 270-pound motorcycle *couldn't* do whoops, kind of a Newtonian law of physics or something, but the new bike is great in rough stuff.

In some types of riding, the XR's suspension is better than that of bikes weighing 40 pounds less. Low-speed rocky sections, for example, are amazingly smooth on the XR. The bike's weight can actually work for it—having a heavier motorcycle provides the same effect as having less unsprung weight. A massive object that is at rest wants to stay at rest (remember that from physics class?), so the bulk of the motorcycle will remain at rest (on the horizontal plane, at least) while the wheels go crazy sucking up all the bumps. That's the theory, anyway, but it's only relevant if the suspension is working right. On the XR, the suspension works right.

There are limits to the XR's suspension. If you pound the bike hard and fast on motocross-style bumps, the shock gets hot and starts losing damping. The fork still is very good no matter how hard you ride.

BIG IS STILL BIG

No matter how good the new suspension is, though, the XR still is a heavy bike. All that stuff about an object at rest has a flip side: a massive object in motion wants to stay in motion. The more massive the object, the more it wants to stay in motion. That means that changing direction on the XR requires a bit of old-fashioned muscle. The same thing goes for stopping the Honda—no matter how good the new rear brake is, the XR *can't* stop as quickly as a bike that weighs less. That's just a law of nature.

In all fairness, Honda has done an excellent job of making the XR feel lighter than it really is. The bike has very quick steering geometry and a short wheelbase. At slow speed, the bike turns quickly and easily. At higher speed, your ability to turn depends on how much traction there is. Having a berm or something to bounce off of really helps.

What's strange about it is that the trickiest four-stroke of all has been around for years, sitting at Honda dealers. That's right, the Honda XR600R might just be the trickiest four-stroke made, but no one would know that from the attention it gets. It just sits in the showroom with a "hey, remember me?" look on its face, while everyone rushes in to look at the ATKs, Husabergs and KTMs of the world.

WHAT MAKES IT SO TRICK?

"Come on," you say. "Honda XR600s are appliances. They're about as trick as two-speed Maytags." Not so. This year Honda finally paid some attention to the XR, changing it from a reliable motorcycle to a reliable motorcycle that performs. It's trick because, when it rolls off the showroom

XR600/XR630

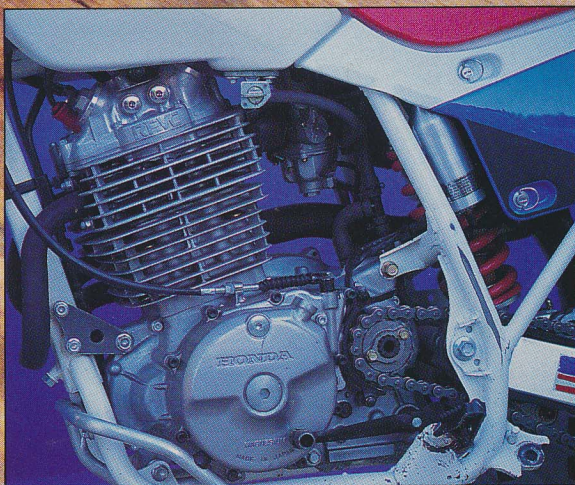
For the first time in four-stroke history, the Honda XR has suspension that is as good as that of the CR line.

IT KEEPS ON THUMPING

XRs are reputed to be pretty tough. People say you can throw one off a cliff and, when you climb down to get it, it will still be idling like nothing happened. We could not find any handy cliffs, but we did have the next best thing: the Baja 1000. In the course of racing the XR all over Mexico, we couldn't make it break. Not that we didn't try; we even installed a rear wheel without the spacer on the right-hand side. It didn't seem to mind. It has also been said that XRs are great play bikes but poor race bikes. The only failure that they historically suffer in races relates to the ignition. That's why Honda switched ignition makers from Hitachi to ND. Time will tell if the problem is cured.

If so, the XR probably is the most reliable motorcycle in the business. It's not a piece of jewelry, not something you want to park in your living room and invite guests over to look at. It's a workhorse of a motorcycle that's meant to be ridden hard and long, then ridden some more. We'd say that makes it a pretty special motorcycle.

Exotic? Probably not. Trick? Definitely.



Race you for pinks? The competition kit consists of a larger piston and rings, a cam and assorted parts, none of which are noticeable from the outside.