GREEVES/HONDA 250 SHOOTOUT

Four shocks vs. one

As you no doubt know, the staff of *Dirt Bike* is preoccupied with comparison tests in a big way. We call 'em shootouts. The whole idea is to find out which bike is the best within its category. Well, you could have knocked us over with a feather when a fresh new name appeared on the horizon recently, without so much as a word of warning!

We were out at the Dunes recently, shooting out a veritable gaggle of hot new bikes . . . all of them 250s. Just about the time we were ready to wrap it up for the day, one of the thoroughly exhausted test riders pointed out a very different-looking bike taking laps around the burned-out International track.

Odd. The bike was blue and sported a front end that looked like a DeCoster/Ribi hybrid; it was a dual-shock, rocker-type affair that appeared very sturdy.

Our interest piqued, the well-lit *DB* staff flagged down the rider and inspected his machine closer. It was a Greeves (?) 250 and was made in England, of all places! Right then and there, we decided to compare this new upstart with one of our better test bikes. The 1983 Honda 250 was selected, based on light weight, good power and the latest technology. How would it stack up against the Greeves? We were interested, too.

TECH FEATURES: A QUICK GLANCE

Dry weight:

Honda—220.50 pounds.

Greeves—218.161283 pounds.

Wow! With an empty gas tank, the Greeves has the Honda beat by a little over two pounds. Obviously, some serious technology went into getting the Greeves *that* light!

Engine:

Honda—Water-cooled, reed-valved two-stroke, with a five-speed gearbox. Gear-driven primary drive.

Greeves—New-concept air-cooled engine with (get this!) no reed valve. Four-speed gearbox (trick!!) and primary chain drive. Engine and gearbox are separate, but bolted together (wow!).

Say, sport, it's obvious that the Greeves is not stilted and stuck in a rut and is willing to take chances with some fresh new ideas. The four-speed gearbox is just now finding its way into 500cc bikes, and here's Greeves with that feature on a 250! Talk about innovative!

And how about that two-piece engine/gearbox setup? Eliminating the reed valve might just be the secret to getting some *real* horsepower. Why hasn't anybody else thought of this? And how about that chain to transmit power from the primary drive to the clutch basket? Neato. Trim, slim and very, very efficient Very worksy, eh?

Double jumps? Triples? No sweat on the Greeves. Just take them one at a time. The Honda spent too much time in the air by jumping all three.

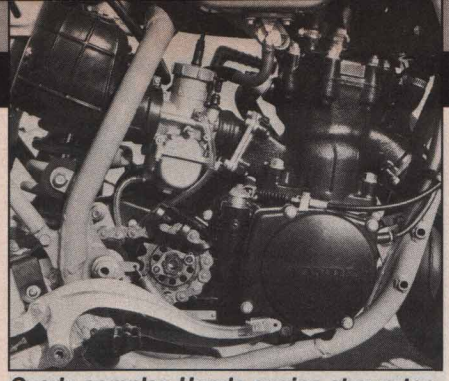
Suspension:

Honda—Single-shock rear end with adjustable compression and rebound damping. Large telescopic forks with adjustable compression damping. Pretty much basic stuff.

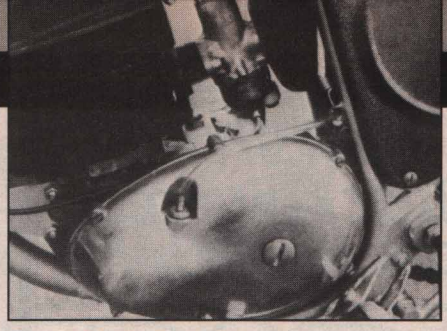
Greeves—Radical "springer" front end with two Girling shocks mounted on a rocker-type arm, giving a true rising-rate suspension. The tubes are hefty and look nearly unbreakable. Fresh twin-shock approach (similar to Husky, but much more radical mounting position) with both shocks mounted outboard of rear wheel and into the cooling airflow.

Hmmmph! Just at a glance, one can see the advantages of the Greeves suspension, at both ends. Not only is the twin-shock front end the very latest in trickology, but the rider is not hindered with any adjustments to fiddle with all the time. Even air caps are unnecessary. Same with the rear end. All you do is dial in the preload you want, and there are no other time-wasting dials and gee-gaws to diddle around with. Quite a breakthrough. As the owner of the Greeves told us, "Hey, if it's right, you don't have to screw around with it. The more knobs and junk you have on a bike, the more wrong you can get it."

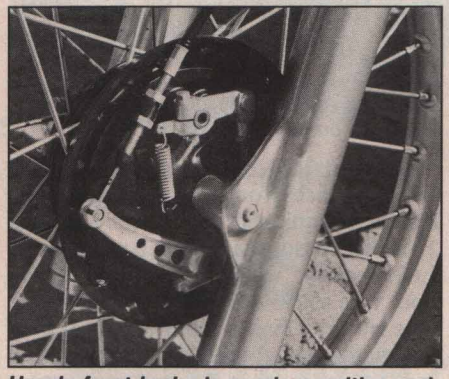
We also like the way the rear shocks are mounted near the rear axle in an almost



Overly complex Honda engine shows too many things packed into too little space.



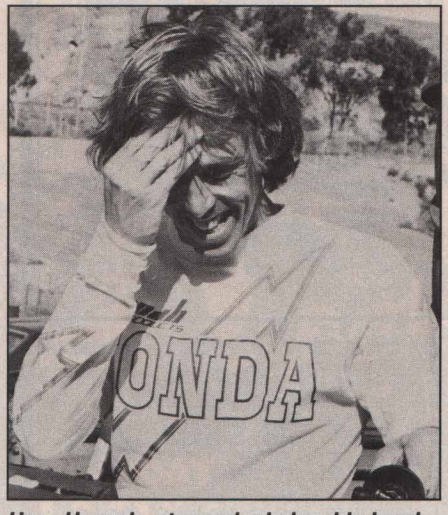
Clean and simple Greeves engine has lots of space and few frills. Our crack test crew couldn't find the reed setup, so it must internal. Clever.



Honda front brake is overly sensitive and nestled between a set of ordinary fork tubes.

Greeves front brake is spot-on; no matter how hard you pull on the brake lever, the front wheel will not lock up. Front end is a work of art and makes the DeCoster/Ribi fork appear crude by comparison.

New King of the 250s? It sure looks like it, as the Greeves 250 goes through its paces at Bandini Raceway, in Storkfat, Nebraska.



Here Hannah, stunned, shakes his head in disbelief after the Greeves smoked his works Honda in a kick-the-can race.

vertical position, clearly a very efficient angle and able to directly deal with any bumps, rather than having the impact routed all over the place before the shock can get around to the business of moving up and down properly.

We also liked the fact that no cumbersome reservoirs were dangling all over the rear end to make maintenance a hassle. In fact, other than an occasional preload adjustment, there is *no maintenance* required to speak of. Compare that with the Honda, which *must* have all those links and pivot points cleaned and lubed on a nauseatingly regular basis. Congrats, Greeves, for a step in the right direction.

Bits and Pieces:

Honda—Aluminum muffler for light weight, twin-leading shoe front brake, aluminum swingarm, two-gallon gas tank, 38-inch saddle height, aluminum alloy rims and left-side shift.

Greeves—No muffler at all, which has to be the ultimate in weight-savings technology, and a single-leading shoe front brake with a full-floating backing plate setup. The swingarm is made out of real steel, not some funny soft alloy, and the gas tank is a big three-gallon unit, one full gallon more than the Honda. Also, the tank is made out of fiberglass, which makes it easy to keep the decals on, unlike the plastic junk found on the Honda. Also, the fenders on the Greeves are shiny polished aluminum, which adds a nice touch to the overall appearance. Even the side panels are made of new space-age fiberglass, straight out of the latest aerospace technology. A seat height of 29 inches represents a distinct breakthrough in this day and age of ridiculously tall saddles.

A welcome touch is the use of ultra-strong steel for rims, instead of the troublesome aluminum alloy found on the Honda and other bikes. One other eye-grabber: The Greeves has a right-side shift lever, a startling innovation. They did a clever bit of engineering to allow the kickstarter a clear swing when starting; the footpeg is held up and out of the way by a metal ring. After the bike is fired up, the rider can simply nudge the ring free and the peg snaps back into place. Nice.

GREEVES GRIPES

While the Greeves is a genuine breakthrough, it is not, however, without fault. The Amal carb wept a bit and starting was occasionally a hit-or-miss proposition. also, the bars were a bit too low for our taste. Other than that, though, the bike was spot-on.

HONDA HASSLES

After the minor glitches with the Greeves, the Honda was a regular can of worms. Getting on the bike took a milk crate and the saddle had an odd shape going all the way up on the tank. We felt that the warm-up period required with the watercooling was a pain in the neck and many adjustments available were confusing and time-consuming. And that saddle height! Hey, c'mon. Nosebleed city. It was also a pain in the neck to clean and service the foam air filter. On the Greeves, you simply replace the paper filter. What could be easier?

RIDING THE CONTENDERS

We'd have to rate the Greeves tops in this department, mostly because the mellow power delivery made for smooth and easy riding. No unwanted or surprising wheelies here. With the Honda, the front end was always coming up, making our test rider shut off prematurely.

With the low saddle height on the Greeves, it simply ate up the flat, smooth corners. With the Honda, it was difficult to get both feet firmly on the ground while cornering. Points to the Greeves here.

We found the brakes on the Honda way too touchy. With the Greeves, you could literally stand on the rear brake pedal and the brake would not lock up. Neat touch. The Honda front brake was so sensitive our testers could actually lock the front wheel up with two fingers on the lever. Not so with the Greeves. The brake cable had just the right amount of flex in it to let the front wheel keep turning freely, no matter how much pressure was applied to the lever. Clever idea and long overdue, we say.

The four-speed gearbox on the Greeves saved time when shifting. The Honda is handicapped with a five-speed box, which demands the rider spend most of his time going from one gear to another. Bothersome, at best.

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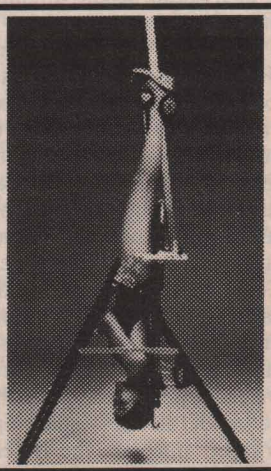


SHOOTOUT

High flying and bristling with technology, the Greeves is clearly the forerunner of things to come.

One item worth mentioning: The Greeves has a 19-inch front wheel, whereas the Honda is equipped with a conventional 21-incher. Also, the Honda has a spindly 3.00 knobby, while the Greeves comes stock with a 3.50 x 19 trials patterned front. This lets the Greeves front end float over sand quite easily, while the Honda front end tends to knife in. Of course, a regular knobby is found at the rear of both bikes.

In a basic drag race to the first turn, it was the Greeves every time, as the Honda spun the rear wheel wildly and refused to hook up. With the Greeves, it was total hookup with barely a hint of wheelspin. Talk about traction! While not overpowering in the muscle department, let's just say that the Greeves had enough to get the job done. And how much more does a rider need?

Over the really bad bumps, the Greeves handled things in a rather unique fashion. Rather than slamming over them in an out-of-control style, the Greeves would ride down in and through the whoops, keeping that all-important wheel contact with the terrain. The Honda, on the other hand, kept gyrating and leaping wildly from whoop to whoop, causing much concern among our savvy testers.

BITS AND PIECES

The garish blue saddle/red plastic color scheme on the Honda was a real turnoff. The tasteful dull blue of the Greeves was complemented well by the polished aluminum fenders and the shiny steel rims.

Both bikes had high pipes mounted on the left side. Obviously Honda has been copying Greeves here.

The Honda has a smallish plastic gas cap on an oddly shaped gas tank. The Greeves has a nifty steel gas cap with a finger-tip locking device that lets the cap flip up for easy refueling. Whew! Where do they keep coming up with all those ideas?

THE BOTTOM LINE: WHICH BIKE FOR YOU?

No contest here. The Greeves appears to be The Bike of the Eighties, hands down. Even though it's a relative newcomer to the scene, you can sure plan on seeing a lot more of them in the future.

(continued on page 71)

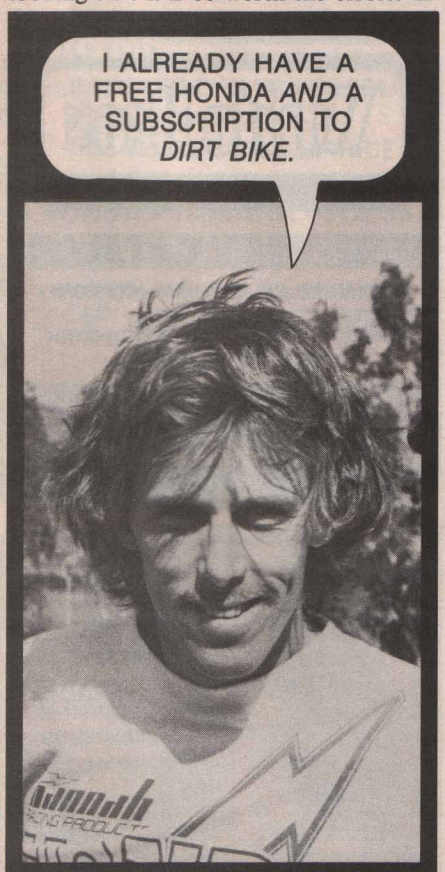
GREEVES vs. HONDA
(continued from page 64)

After testing both of the bikes head to head, technical features aside, the Greeves still emerges as the bike of choice for economic reasons alone, as the suggested retail price is only $995. The owner showed us a rather worn brochure with the price printed on it, so we know this is not a joke. Compare that with the suggested retail price of the Honda at over $2000 and you get the picture. Just who is kidding whom?

You can only stay at the top by dint of extra effort and technical savvy. As it stands now, Honda will have to burn some serious midnight oil to catch up to the Greeves. It looks like the day of the Griffon is upon us. Will we see Hannah on a Greeves next year? When we asked the Hurricane about that, he merely nodded his head to one side and quipped, "What? Are you guys nuts or something?"

We can only interpret that as a full endorsement of the Greeves and an unwillingness to let us in on any possible secret negotiations between Bob and the Greeves factory. Will we see the Trophee and MX de Nations team mounted on Greeves this year? Only time will tell.

Just about the only serious drawback to owning a Greeves that we can see is the rather limited availability of the bike. We checked the entire L.A. yellow pages and couldn't find a single listing. But, keep looking . . . it'll be worth the effort. □



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