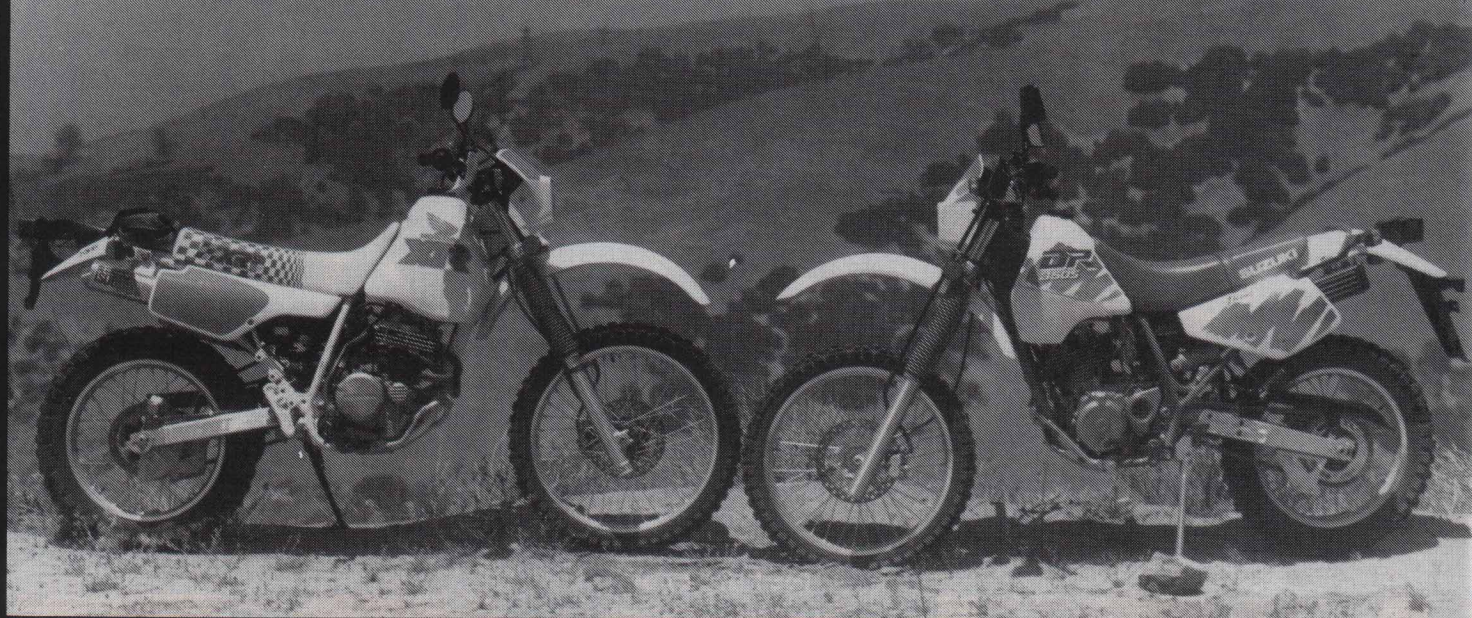


IS THE BEST 350 A 280?



Some things you just *have* to finish. Otherwise, it's like reading *Moby Dick* right up until the last chapter and then putting the book down. Or like leading your moto, then pulling off on the white flag lap. That's how we felt about the two best dual-sport bikes made: the Honda XR250L and the Suzuki DR350S. Both bikes are pretty good stock, but not quite finished. We couldn't resist putting on the final touches ourselves.

◀ *Works Enduro Rider's suspension mods make jumping the DR350S a cause for fun rather than fear, as with the stock setup. The firmer, more stable ride helps the bike on the street and lets it tap more of its considerable potential off-road.*

In the case of Honda's XR250L, the final touch involved finding a lot of horsepower and a little bit of suspension. Compared to the Suzuki, it has a 100cc disadvantage and nearly an inch less suspension travel at both ends. So we sent it to Al Baker's XRs Only for the works. It came back with a 280cc kit and reworked suspension.

The Suzuki's shortcoming is handling. Most of that is due to excessive weight, which is a tough problem to remedy—one that would have blown our budget and involved virtually remanufacturing the motorcycle. However, some of the problem can be blamed on the stock suspension, which gives the bike an undeserved case of weak knees when it is ridden at anything above casual trail speeds. Our solution was to treat it to Works Enduro Rider's suspension service. Multi-ISDE medalist Drew Smith, the man behind WER, was in on DR development from the beginning, so he knows where to pick up where the factory left off and how the DR suspension parts respond to springing and valving changes. We put both bikes on the best street-legal off-road tires around, Pirelli's MT17s, to make sure they had an equal grip on the varied terrain our dual-sport duel

would put them through.

When we were done, we had two super dual-sport bikes. The next step was to do what any red-blooded editor would do: Put the two bikes in the ring and let them have at it.

ROUND 1: BOBBING & WEAVING

Stock suspension on Honda's XR250L is at least usable for trail riding. That makes it the best stock dual-sport suspension available. It's got a long way to go to please faster riders or anyone who plans to use the bike frequently in the dirt. XRs Only resprung the forks and revalved and resprung the 250L's shock—that changed the bike's personality dramatically. Firmer springs at both ends and heavier shock damping keep the bike stable at speeds that would force the rider to back off or brace for bottoming on the stock bike.

Despite its abundant travel, the stock Suzuki's suspension gets overworked just about the time you start having fun on the trail. Push much harder and the 350 will pitch and wallow enough to scare you. The bike even gets a little weird on the street if you get aggressive, because the springs and damping are so light. Drew Smith's suspension mods let us enjoy the bike to the point where we started taking foolish chances with it. So score the Suzuki and Smith an A in the "Getting Away With Foolish Chances" department.

Back-to-back rides on both machines



showed the XR to be slightly more controllable over tight, technical terrain, primarily because of its lighter weight. The modified DRS was more at home at speed. They both became really fun to ride, and the suspenders of both bikes let you forget you were on a dual-sport bike. Yes, the DR still weighed more than the XR, but that only was apparent at odd moments. Any given ride is likely to put both machines in terrain that favors one or the other some of the time, so we'll have to give both bikes an equal score in the suspension wars.

ROUND 2: PUNCH OR BE PUNCHED

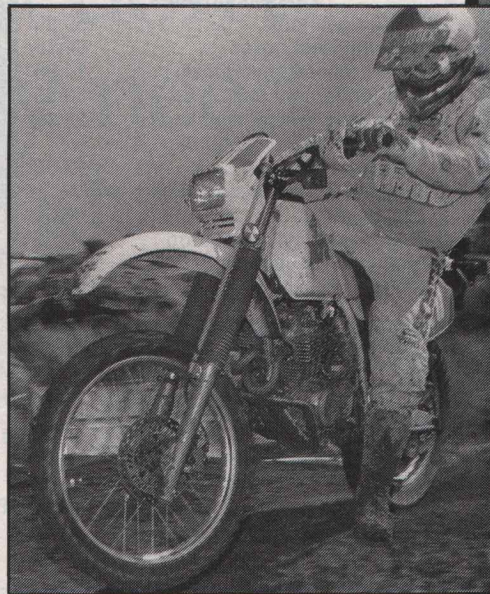
We let XRs Only go wild with our XR250L engine, and it shows. Extended fins help the high-compression top end rid itself of the extra heat it makes while it twists out power that humbles the stock engine. XRs Only 280s are well known for their strong top-end power delivery and it adds thrills, off-road and on, to the bike's overall performance, but we really enjoyed the beefed-up pull off the bottom. Shift hard into second and the 280's front end is in the air. Cranking the throttle open keeps it there with nearly the same authority as the 350. It really has a 350-like feel. Unfortunately, like the 350, the XRs Only 280 runs out of breath a little early, and vibration gets heavy when you scream the engine. The 280 will rev a little higher than the 350, but neither bike is a screamer.

For a full-on racing engine, the 280 is remarkably well mannered. It starts as effort-

DIRT BIKE'S Tim Tolleson laid waste to the competition in the first dual-sport moto at the four-stroke MX world championships. ►

lessly as the stocker and idles along trails or in traffic without any fuss. Cobra's prototype ISDE Pro silencer let the engine breathe nearly as well as a full-on racing pipe, but was quiet enough to be totally inoffensive in town. The only thing that kept the 280 from being a perfectly friendly hot rod was its tendency to ping on some types of pump gas (we used premium only) when we were on the street in high temperatures with a heavy load on the engine. Octane boosters, like those from PJ1, Maxima, Klotz and Octamax, cured the pinging at a more economical price than race gas. The pinging seldom surfaced in off-road riding, where there's rarely enough traction to load the engine like the perfect grip of pavement can.

The 280 gets a few solid punches in on the 350 but the DRS, with the simple addition of a Cobra ISDE Pro silencer, wins this round. There's just no topping the 350's relaxed spread of torque power and its healthy reserve of steam for maintaining highway speeds in top gear. Ride both bikes on a long, flat road and you soon appreciate the Suzuki's tolerance for pump fuel of any grade and the DRS engine's mechanical quietness. There's less top-end noise than some liquid-cooled thumpers, and it's easily the quietest air-cooled four-stroke.



ROUND 3: THERE'S ONLY ONE WINNER

Every time we ride the XRs Only XR280L we are stunned at what the bike has become. In engine performance, it has an ideal blend of 350-style low-end torque and 250-like revability. Out on the trail, its 250-class heritage shines through. It's a cut above the hefty 350 in the easy way it responds to rider input when the terrain gets technical. A 3.2-gallon IMS tank takes care of the XR250L's only

BEST 350?

AL BAKER'S XR_s ONLY XR280L PARTS PRICES

6944 Santa Fe Ave.
Hesperia, CA 92345
(619) 244-2626, (800) 421-1478

Big-bore piston kit including cylinder boring	\$159.95
Engine: Head porting and polishing, three-angle valve job, valve seal and spring installation	195.00
Honda hi-temp valve seals (4)	18.04
Heavy-duty valve springs	59.95
Mugen competition grind cam	129.95
Extended cylinder head finning	195.00
Mikuni 34mm flat-slide carb kit w/throttle	169.00
K&N Hi-Flow air filter	34.98
Air boot boost bottle plug	12.95
Large-diameter head pipe set	89.95
Cobra ISDE Pro silencer	129.95
K&N engine breather	14.95
Magnetic drain plug	12.95
Total engine performance package	1193.57
Suspension	
Progressive Suspension 20-/30-lb. dual rate fork springs	55.95
Progressive Suspension rear shock springs	69.95
Pro-Link shock revalve	120.00
Silkolene suspension fluid	13.90
Total suspension performance package	259.80
Chassis updates	
IMS 4.6-gal. tank	159.95
XR _s Only seat cover	24.95
'91 XR replica tank decals	14.95
Rear fender tool bag	39.95
Heavy-duty folding shift lever	22.95
XR _s Only alloy chainguide brace	18.95
Sprocket Specialists aluminum rear sprocket	40.00
Rear master cylinder guard	19.95
Total chassis updates	341.65
XR280L project total	1795.02

SUZUKI DR350S MODIFICATIONS

Cobra ISDE Pro silencer \$129.95

SUSPENSION MODS

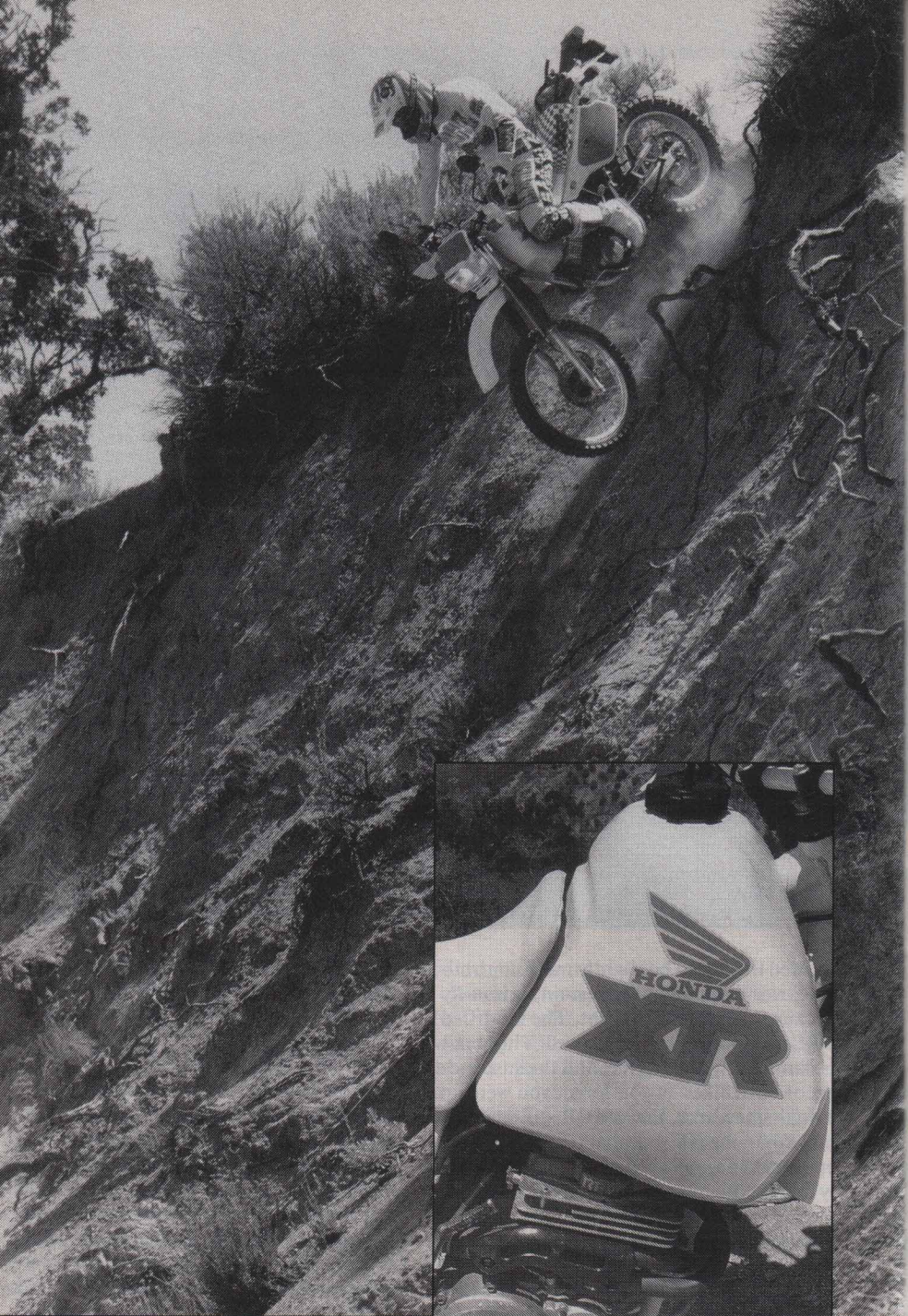
Works Enduro Rider

Box 279A, Jenny Jump Ave.
Great Meadows, NJ 07838
(908) 637-6385

Fork revalve	\$90.00
Fork springs	49.00
Shock revalve	95.00
Shock spring	59.00

other major weakness, meager fuel capacity. The stock bike could cover just over 80 miles with the stock tank before going on reserve. With the IMS tank, you don't hit reserve until well past the 130-mile mark.

The 280 needed a healthy injection of high-performance parts to reach the state it's in—there's nearly \$1200 invested in the engine alone—but we wanted to give it a solid chance of taking the 350 dual-sport class ti-



Don't try this with your stock XR250L. Modified suspension reminds you that there really is an XR250 inside the dual-sport version.

tle. The result is a far better dirt bike than the stock XR250L. Because of the engine, the 280 is a more exciting, though rarely faster, machine to ride than our mildly modified DR350S.

XR_s Only has less expensive kits for XR250L owners who are satisfied to bump performance well above stock 250, rather than hunt down 350s. The \$325 kit gets you a K&N filter, XR250 carb, fork springs, excellent Grand Sport tires and a Cobra ISDE exhaust. The result is a bike that's twice as much fun in the dirt.

Suzuki's 350 came alive with the simple



Even the most practical XR250L owners can appreciate the increased fuel range, greater comfort (hit your knees on a steel tank lately?) and resistance to damage IMS' 3.2-gal. plastic tank provides. XR_s Only's factory replica decals finish the tank at a fraction of the cost of original emblems. The big-fin 280 engine is for the seriously performance-crazed.

addition of decent suspension and a Cobra pipe. At last, you get to experience the broad capabilities of its engine. It lacks some of the functional add-ons the 280 got, but the DR350S improved so much with such a modest investment that it wins this shootout and retains its position as the dual-sport to beat. □