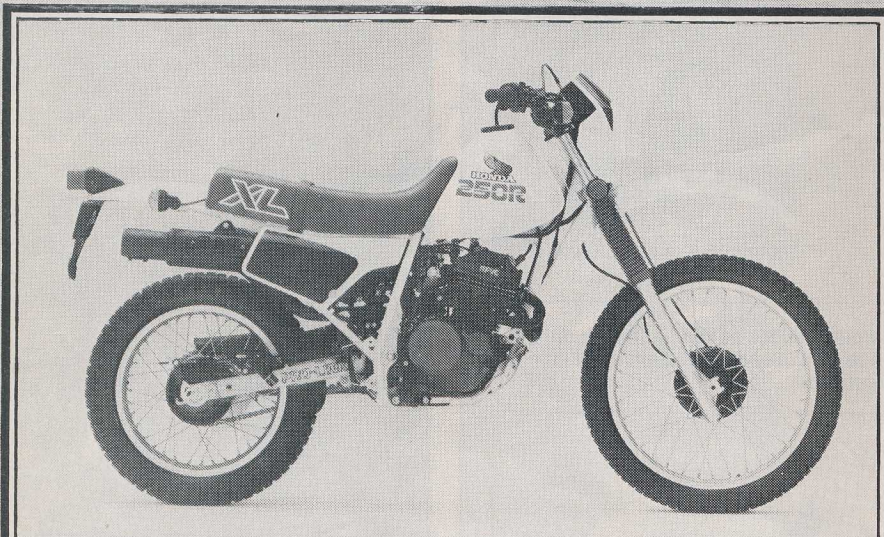


TWO TIMES THE FUN!

HONDA XL250R

Dual-purpose disco



Once on the pavement, the middleweight XL thrives. The stock D-P tires are marginal dirt performers but hook up fairly well on the tarmac. The two-passenger seat is comfortable enough for all-day rides.

Choose your line: The Honda's cornering manners vary, based on the type of terrain. In high-traction situations the bike is willing to hug the inside until it's time to wheelie out; in slippery, dry, hard-packed conditions, the outside slide works best. ▼



HONDA XL250R

Engine type	Single-cylinder, air-cooled, four-stroke	Rear	Pro-Link, 7.6 in. travel
Bore and stroke	75mm x 56.3mm	Wheelbase	54.3 in.
Displacement	249cc	Ground clearance	11.4 in.
Carburetion	(2) 24mm Keihin	Seat height	33.6 in.
Lubrication	Wet sump	Weight	258 lbs.
Fuel tank capacity	2.7 gal. w/ 6-gal. reserve	Country of origin	Japan
Transmission	6-speed	Retail price	\$2098
Gearing front/rear	13/40		
Ignition	CDI		
Suspension:			
Front	37mm air-adj., 8.7 in. travel		

Distributor/Manufacturer:
American Honda Motor Corp.
100 W. Alondra Ave.
Gardena, CA 90247

Waay back in 1972, Honda made a big splash with the first XL250. The original dual-purpose four-stroke in a world of screaming two-strokes (they called 'em "ring-dings" back then), the XL was stone reliable, lots of fun on the streets, looked trick, and allowed its rider the ability to explore the trails with some prowess.

What transpired with subsequent models becomes a little scary. Year after year, the XL changed. Starting out as an innocent mid-sized playbike, the 250 was transformed into a heavy, ugly, underpowered, wimpy-suspended toad machine. The engines coughed, suspensions clanked, and owners wept. Riding the XL250 off road was akin to vacationing in Lybia.

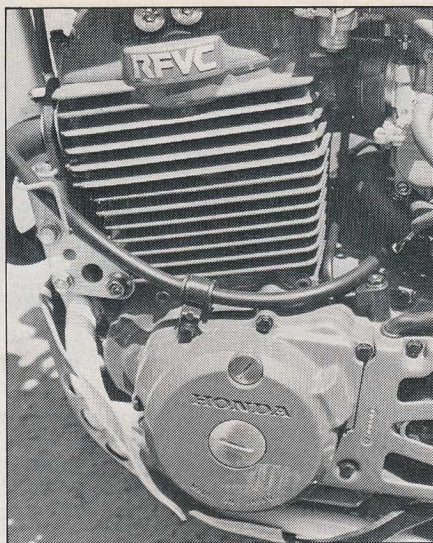
FULL CIRCLE

In 1985, Honda made the decision to put a little life into the XL. The result was an entirely new machine. From its twin carb setup to its XR-style frame and suspension, the new XL glistened with state-of-the-art goodies. Now, 11 years after its original introduction, Honda has finally created an XL250R that's actually better than the original gray and red tanked model.

For 1986, the XL has received a few changes for easier starting, but the big news is in the graphics dept. The 250R acquired a major face lift and now looks more like a racer than ever before. But does the performance equal its great looks? Let's run through the categories that concern you and us the most.

POWER

Designed along the lines of Honda's XR250R engine, the XL's four-valve, four-stroke mill pumps out a good supply of power, but even more impressive is the torque curve. As with any four-stroke worth its salt, pattering around at sub-roost rpms is child's play. Instead of being a bottom-end-only machine, the Honda, due largely to the dual 24mm carburetors, will churn out excellent pulling power through the mid-range. After achieving that mid-range blast, you'd best shift. Though the engine will scream, winding the bugger out does little good; effective horsepower takes a nose dive when higher R's come into play. Short-shift the XL and live happily ever after.



Honda's new-wave XL motor shares its heritage with the latest off-road-only XR engine. Overall power output is excellent—the motor churns off the bottom and soars into a healthy mid-range hook. The four-valve design lets the engine spin into the rev stratosphere, but the heart of the powerband is still in the middle.

Lurking inside that fire-engine-red mill is a six-speed tranny. First gear is a tad too low, and sixth much too high. The remaining second through fifth cogs are well suited for any trail or traffic conditions that may arise.

Typical of any four-stroke Honda, clutch pull is light, and the action is excellent. The unit seems to thrive on abuse, and abuse it we did.

SUSPENSION

Compared to most dual-purpose bikes, the XL250R's bump-soakers work fine for most trail expeditions. The forks are a little mushy, but a little fiddling with oil, spacers, and air volume should get them into the "happy medium" ballpark.

Out back, the single rear shock works well up to a certain degree, but hitting a nasty whoop section at any speed quickly reveals all the unit's shortcomings. Honda's traditional wimpy spring doesn't give the shock a chance to absorb any harsh blows. Crummy rebound then takes over, giving the rider a pogo ride. This condition only happens at speed through the rough stuff.

For fire roads or casual trails, the soft fore-and-aft suspension offers a cushy ride most pilots will appreciate.

HANDLING

Because of its relatively light weight (258 pounds), the Honda has a quick and nimble feel to it. In the dirt, things can become a little squirrely—the result of dual-purpose tires. They just don't get enough grip. We did happen to take the XL out on a mega-traction day after it rained, and found the Honda to be a neutral handler off road. Corners were easily tackled. Using the inside line or a berm was purely rider preference, as the Honda has no qualms about slicing across either.

Street cruising is where the XL thrives. The lightweight machine can twist through canyon roads like an overly suspended



Like all dual-purpose machines, the XL's off-road suspension performance is compromised by its street-going requirements. The bike is plush and comfy on the high-ways, but things get a bit mushy and unpredictable in the dirt. Still, its performance is better than you'd expect from this kind of bike, and a good rider can push the machine at a respectable pace along the trails.

roadracer. The stock tires seem to work much better on the road than they do off the road.

B&P

Honda did an excellent job of mounting the lights, turn signals, and other legal hardware. During the course of testing, our machine was dropped a few times; much to our surprise, nothing broke or came loose.

The XL250R employs an automatic compression release that works in conjunction with the kickstarter. This is fine, but remember to let the kickstarter return to its original position before kicking again if it doesn't fire. The compression release is activated during the first inch or so of travel; if you try to kick the starter past that point, the compression release won't work. This leaves you to "he-man" the starter through its arc.

If you're the kind of guy who wants to have the trickiest-looking bike at the burger stand, purchase the XL. Honda's graphics department could give Porsche design people fits in a radical-looks contest.

The speedo on our test unit lies like a sleazy politician during an election year. At 35 mph the speedo read 50!

Stopping power with the non-disc front brake is amazing. The brake requires only two fingers to lock up, and it offers outstanding controllability. Reverse wheelies? No problem!

WANT ADS

Wanted: Motorcycle rider who likes to use his machine for all purposes. Must be willing to sacrifice a little dirt performance in exchange for nice street manners. Applicant shouldn't be too interested in freeway action, but have a healthy desire to cruise Main Street on Saturday night. An eye for great-looking scoots would be a plus. If this sounds like you, contact your local Honda dealer and ask for the XL250R. □

