

**HONDA'S OUTRAGEOUS XR250: WILL IT MAKE THE 2-STROKE OBSOLETE?!**

# DIRT BIKE

DIRT BIKE

WPS 34355

JUNE 1986

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**HOW TO DO WHEELIES & WHY THEY'RE SO IMPORTANT!**

**SUZUKI'S NEW 125: WILL IT ESCALATE THE RMs RACE?!**

**KDX HOP-UP!!**

**DAYTONA RACE ACTION & SMASH-UPS!**

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ALL-NEW 1986 HONDA XR250

**KX500:**

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**BIG-WHEEL SHOWDOWN: HONDA'S FAT CAT vs. YAMAHA'S BW!**

**BARK-BUSTER SHOOTOUT: 10 WAYS TO LOSE YOUR FEAR OF TREES!**

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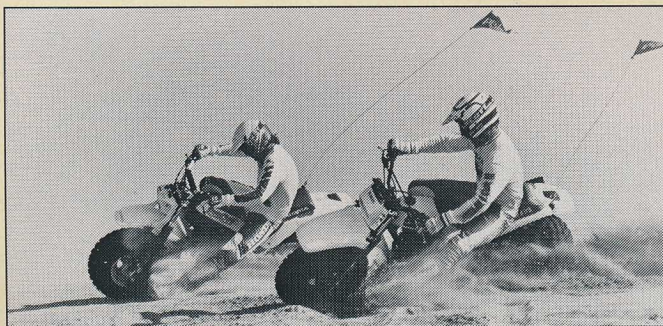
DAYTONA



HONDA XR250



WHEELIES



FAT CAT vs. BW200



KDX HOP-UP



SUZUKI RM125

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... or, *Pain & Suffering Digest*

**ON THE COVER:**—are a bunch of tiny colored dots that started out as a piece of film in a camera. We took the piece of film, Honda's 1986 XR250, and test rider Steve Schmitz to a place with lots of green grass and trees. Mike and Tom found the place along with the KX500 and BW200/Fat Cat action, and Fran snapped the photo. What a life. Anyway, the piece of film went through the washer at Webb's and came out looking remarkably good, so the Boss put it on the cover. DeWest graciously DeSigned the whole thing, and there you have it—yet another issue of *Dirt Bike!*

**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.



The original XR250 began life in 1979 as a scaled-down XR500. While the engineers at Honda fiddled with the possibilities of punching out the two-valve, 200cc motor, they ran into problems with reliability and settled for a down-sized 500 motor. The tried-and-true 250 was a machine designed for the play rider with its docile motor and average suspension units, and it did the job it was intended to do.

For several years the bike rode the same production course, until 1984, when the RFVC, or Honda's Radial Four Valve Combustion chamber was introduced in an effort to broaden the powerband and increase the compression. The '84 and '85 XR250s upped their competitive value with increases in suspension and motor output but still remained, at best, serious playbikes.

**OUT WITH  
THE OLD &  
IN WITH  
THE NEW**

No more Mr. Nice Bike

By the Staff of DIRT BIKE

### TIME TO GET SERIOUS

Nineteen eighty-six has seen the Honda people reevaluate their game plan in the four-stroke lineup. The mainstay XR350 has been dropped, and a major effort has gone into the development work of the '86 XR250.

Though the 350cc bike was a popular choice with the consumer, and probably the best enduro effort ever offered by Honda, it was hurt by its displacement. A small four-stroke can't compete with a small two-stroke, and an Open four-stroke gives away too much weight to the Open two-stroke. With this in mind, the Honda engineers channeled their efforts toward building the best four-stroke 250 they could.

The '86 XR250 is designed to meet the challenges of Eastern enduro competition. Instead of being a 70-percent play and 30-percent serious machine, it is now 70-percent serious and 30-percent play.



*The XR250 at home in its element. Slipsliding through a snow-covered mountain trail brings out the strong points of the Honda. With plenty of four-stroke punch, the XR shredded the white slopes.*

### THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Honda took the peaky power of the '85 machine and reworked the bore and stroke to allow for mid-range muscle. They kept the same compression ratio but dropped the twin 24mm carbs of the past in favor of a single 30mm unit. The '85 oil pump was changed from a single pump to a dual pump. By redirecting the oil away from the mag, they have helped keep things cool and assisted the power increase. With the addition of the steering-mounted oil cooler on this year's bike, they have further increased the cooling capacity.

### PRETTY SNAZZY CHASSIS

The biggest news regarding the new XR is the 238-pound dry weight figure. With the box-section front downtube and the addition of a lightweight, rigid chassis, the old world theory of a fat four-stroke has been reduced immensely. The dimensions of the bike have been altered to allow for a slight increase in the trail and rake from 26 degrees to 26.5 degrees. It still turns with the prowess of the older XR, and has forgiving manners in the sand.

Honda's new-wave thought process concerning the XR is evident in the suspension

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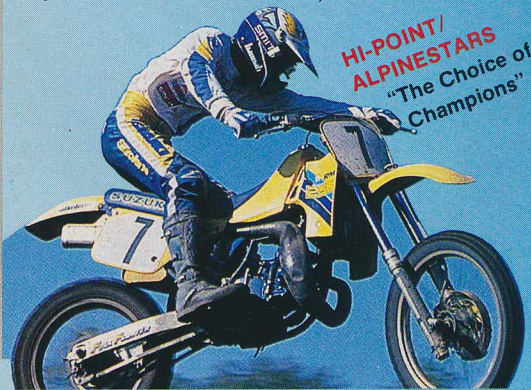
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## "Hurricane" Hannah

\*Terry Cunningham, Nat. Enduro Champion.

\*Heinz Kinigadner, 250 World MX Champion.

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## HONDA XR250R



*The adjustable Kayaba forks went on a beef-up program from '85 and are now 41mm units with a full 11 inches of travel. The action of the forks was on the soft side for our tastes; by adding one inch of oil, a quick remedy was found.*

sophistication for '86. The forks have gone from the marginal 38mm units of yesterday, to the beefy 41mm units on the '86 XR250. They are similar to the motocross legs on the mighty Honda CR125—fully adjustable Kayaba units. The travel has been increased one full inch over the previous 250, from ten to 11 inches, and the performance of the forks would have to be rated as very good. While the action is plush and leans toward the soft side, they should make the Eastern rider happy. In the small bumps they perform flawlessly by sponging up any obstacle they come across. It's only on a major league wallop that glitches surface. They bottom out hard, and transmit the shock directly to the rider. A quick and painless remedy is to increase the oil level (from six inches from the top of the tube to five inches). The result is instant relief for the rider, who can then attack obstacles with little fear.

In the backyard, Honda kept the engineering ball rolling. The steel swingarm of the '85 bike was shelved in favor of an aluminum unit, and the travel punched out from 9.6 inches to a hefty 11 inches of travel. Our first ride on the XR was an exercise in frustration as the Pro-Link swapped, hopped and smacked like a wounded giraffe. The problem lies in the lack of available rebound damping, and only after we set the sag and maxed out the rebound clicker did the action calm down. We feel the shock is the one weak link and definitely needs work.

While they were busy increasing the travel of the shock, Honda put the magic wand on the wheelbase and coaxed another 3.5 inches out of it. With a competitive length wheelbase, the XR has better straight-line stability. It still tends to hunt and wander a bit, but its overall performance is exactly what the Honda boys had set out to accomplish. It carves a razor-sharp turn with



*They tell us the Honda was designed for the Eastern enduro rider. We think this picture clearly demonstrates the Honda's capability on the Western range.*

the right amount of rider input and can haul some serious timber over the straight-line nasties.

### A WORD FROM THE GALLERY

Honda pulled out the stops and focused a serious effort on the enduro competitor. The front disc brake is a twin-piston caliper unit that slows down the rolling Honda nicely. It's not a grabby feel, but a progressive action that all our testers enjoyed. A quick-change rear wheel cuts the time of removing the wheel in half, over the older design. An ingenious clamp system does away with the time-consuming chore of readjusting the chain after pulling the wheel. Speaking of the wheel, Honda has finally dropped the 17-inch wheel of the past. With the use of lower-profile tires, the seat height of the '86 machine remains the same as the '85 bike.

While the body work of the XR is the same as the '85 XR350 in the fenders and side panels, the fuel tank is all new and is now taller, shorter and narrower. The safety seat has also been updated, and the result is an excellent seating position for all riders.

Enduro goodies include a tubular aluminum engine guard that replaces the old skid plate. A rear-fender-mounted tool kit and quick-change air filter that requires no tools to remove are now standard. A cheaper re-settable odometer is stock equipment. Too bad it's not the neat clock/odo combination which is still available as a kit.

### ON THE SADDLE

With all the new tricks that adorned the '86 XR250, our expectations were high. After we performed our cures on the forks and did our best with the rebound damping, we lit out on the trail.

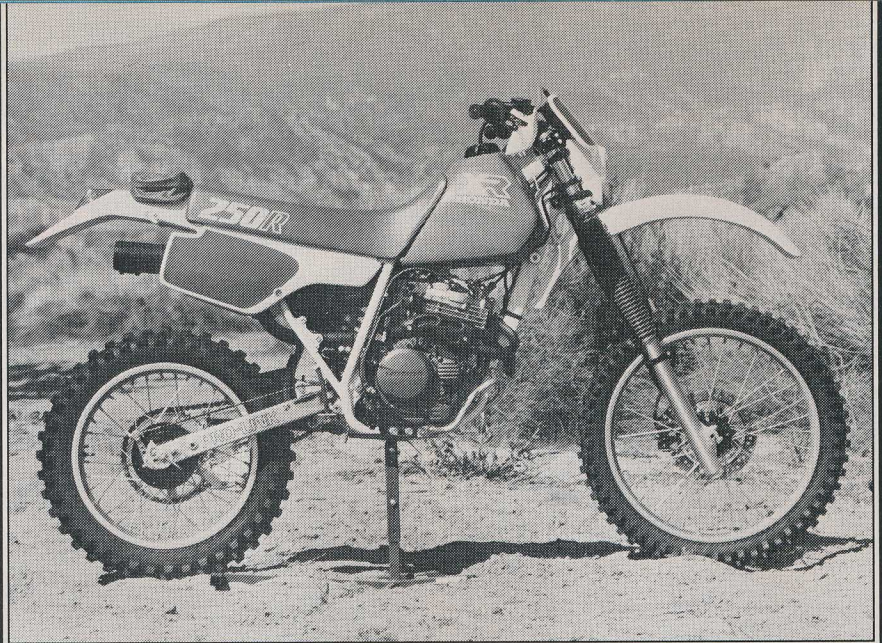
As anyone can attest, going from two-strokes to four-strokes requires an adjustment. The instant snap of the two-stroke mill is replaced by the mellow thump of the four-stroke. But, if you give the four-stroke 250 half a chance, the bike grows on you. The broad powerband is just that—long and broad. We couldn't find a hill the XR wasn't capable of climbing, no matter how steep.

During the course of one of our rides, a rather monstrous precipice was attempted

# HONDA XR250R



*The thunder of the 250 four-stroke is here to stay. Honda did their homework and have created a competitive 250cc enduro machine.*



## 1986 HONDA XR250R

Engine type	Air-cooled, SOHC, RFVC, single-cylinder 4-stroke	Ground clearance	320mm (12.6 in.)
Bore and stroke	73mm x 59.5mm	Seat height	920mm (36.2 in.)
Displacement	249cc	Rake/trail	26.5°/110mm
Carburetion	30mm Keihin	Wet weight, no fuel	238 lbs.
Fuel tank capacity	9.0 L (2.4 gals.)	Tire size and type:	
Lubrication	Dry sump	Front	80/100-21 51M IRC
Gearbox ratios:		Rear	110/100-18 64M IRC
1	2.769:1	Suspension, type and travel:	
2	1.941:1	Front	Kayaba, adj. comp., 280mm (11.0 in.)
3	1.450:1	Rear	Pro-Link, adj. comp./reb., 280mm (11.0 in.)
4	1.174:1	Intended use	Enduro/trail
5	0.960:1	Country of origin	Japan
6	0.815:1	Retail price, approx.	\$2198
Gearing, front/rear	13/48	Distributor/Manufacturer:	
Ignition	CDI w/electronic advance	American Honda Motor Corp.	
Recommended spark plug	NGK D8EA	100 W. Alondra	
Silencer/spark arrester	Yes/yes	Gardena, CA 90247	
Wheelbase	1440mm (56.7 in.)		

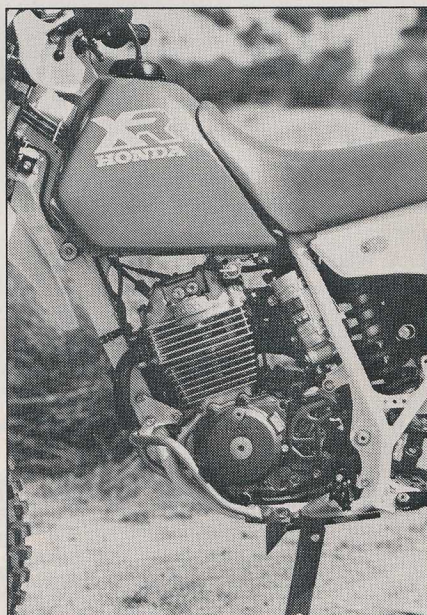
by our group which consisted of one Open two-stroke, one competition two-stroke enduro 250, and the XR. The Open bike conquered the hill with sheer brute power, and the two-stroke 250 slithered and squirmed and finally cleared the hill. Next was the XR, which chugged its way to the top without a snivel.

On fast, wide-open terrain the XR holds its own nicely. Whether it's high-speed sweepers or dancing through the rocks, the XR gets with the program and actually gains time on the faster two-strokes.

The action of the clutch and tranny is flawless, but an inconsistent starting pattern had us confused. Sometimes she would fire on the first kick, and at other times it would require half a dozen. Another complaint is the low footpeg height. More than once we had our feet repositioned by the shrubs on the desert floor. Soon we altered our style to the toes-up position.

### ALL IN ALL

Honda's mission in building the XR250 was a tough chore: Make a competitive, fairly lightweight four-stroke with advanced suspension *and* make it fast. They designed it for the Eastern enduro rider, and it will make the East Coast pilot mighty happy. But the desert destroyers and Western bark busters will be lining up to bag one of these new XR's as well, and the sound of the 250 off-road class might never be the same. □



*The massive skid plate is history and has been replaced with sano tubular aluminum engine case savers. With six speeds at your disposal, the XR is well suited for all situations. The adjustable rear shock on the Pro-Link is the one weak link of the Honda design. The vacant rebound damping is the prime culprit, and no amount of adjusting could solve the jackhammer ride.*



*Updating the enduro add-ons was one of the Honda engineers' main concerns. The quick-detach rear wheel cuts the time required to change the rear wheel in half. A small tool pack rides on top of the rear fender but comes equipped with only the bare necessities. By removing the inner baffle from the cumbersome exhaust system, an immediate horsepower gain is attained.*