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DIRT BIKE

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YZ360 vs. KX500!

YAMAHA'S HOT NEW SCREAMER TAKES ON THE KING OF THE 500s!!

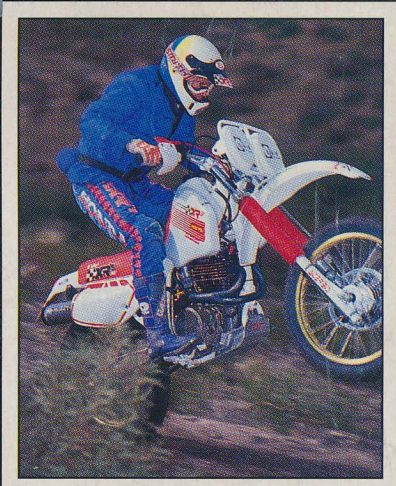


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TESTS

24 XR600R MANIA

Riding four two-stroke-beating thumpers

32 HONDA XLR250R BAJA

Finally, a dirt-worthy dual-sport!

40 NOLEEN YZ360 CONVERSION, PART II

Shooting it out against the KX500

52 YAMAHA CW50 ZUMA SCOOTER

Fun for the whole dirt-biking family

COMPETITION

60 QUICKSILVER NATIONAL ENDURO

A three-way tie at the season opener

TECHNICAL

56 KAWASAKI FACTORY SETUPS

More performance from the KXs and KDX

76 BRAKE BLEEDING TRICKS

Getting the air out without hairing out

78 HOT SETUPS

Motor tricks

FEATURES

38 AMATEUR SUPERCROSS EXPOSE

Where are our future champs coming from?

48 GUIDE TO CONVINCING YOUR PARENTS

Hunky's tips on getting a bike

67 VINTAGE MART

Classic classified and setup tips

68 JOHNNY O'MARA INTERVIEW

The O'Show returns from the abyss

80 WHERE TO RIDE IN NEW YORK

Green skylines and *beaucoup* trailtime

DEPARTMENTS

8 FROM THE SADDLE

Ed's back in the saddle

10 BITS & PIECES

Motocross shakeup and other news flashes

16 MR. KNOW-IT-ALL

Back to his mean old self

18 RICK'S PITBOARD

Advice from the multi-time champ

20 CHECKPOINT

Hunky humor

22 RIDERS WRITE

Feedback and trail news

87 NEW PRODUCTS

Ways to make your own statement

88 CRASH & BURN

Riding school was never like this

ON THE COVER:—What better way to shoot the only water-cooled four-stroke sport machine than to capture an exploding water aerial? Steve Casper is in the saddle on the Kawasaki 250 Mojave and Jeff Maas snapped the photo. The Table of Contents photo is of Derek Nye on our Deserttrax 250R. Chris Hultner was behind the lens. Cover design by DeWest and color seps 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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GRAY MARKET DUAL-SPORT

Testing the bike Honda intended for Japan

By the DIRT BIKE Staff



“This bike is ten times better than the NX250, and you can quote me on that!” shouted an elated test rider after a photo session on the 1989 XLR250R Baja. Loyal Honda dual-sport enthusiasts have lamented the loss of the old XL series and many are shying away from the street-oriented NXs, because of their low front fenders and full fairings, but what are the 250cc dual-sport alternatives? The KLR250 Kawasaki is more dirt-worthy than the NX, but it’s water-cooled and lacks low-end power. Those handy with wrenches could buy an XR250R and make it street-legal (see “Street-Legal XR600R,” March ’89), but Honda has already done just that—for the Japanese market.

Because of its thousands of square miles of off-road heaven, Baja is the rage in Japan, and each year several Japanese teams spend big bucks to race the Baja 500 and 1000. Al Baker, XR research and development consultant for Honda, sells highly modified XRs to the Japanese (and European) teams and provides pit support for the racers; he also exports a large percentage of his breathed-on XRs back to Japan. Baja is so big to the Japanese that Honda developed a street-legal XR250R and sells 10,000 units a year there. Because of Baker’s close relations with Honda Japan, he was able to work out a deal where he can import the

Banzai! Those wanting a street-legal XR250R don't have to build it themselves. Honda builds the XLR250R Baja for the Japanese market and XR R&D whiz Al Baker now can import the bikes into the USA.

You know you own an exotic bike when it comes with an owner's manual that you cannot read. ◀

XLR250R to America. Honda enthusiasts now have an alternative to the NX or converting an XR250R.

BEYOND THE NX250—& THE XL!

Motorwise, the XR and XLR250 are identical. Honda’s radial four-valve combustion head is controlled by a single overhead cam and breathes through a foam filter, 30mm Keihin and two-into-one exhaust headers. The 249cc mill puts out a claimed 28hp at 8500 rpm and puts the ponies to the ground via a six-speed transmission. An external oil cooler and automatic decompression system are also standard.

Unlike the XR, the XLR does not have a removable exhaust diffuser (Japanese environmental standards are strictly enforced) and the machine sports an emissions canister. It also lacks the manual decompression system for starting and has a 428 drive-chain with cushioned rear hub to quiet chain noise. Overall gearing is also taller at .375 to the XR’s .2708. Although the XLR and XR suspension components look identical, the XLR has travel limiters in the forks and shock, and there are no compression adjustments up front or rebound adjustments out back

最高出力 28ps

よりハードなオフロードライディングを可能とするマシン。それがデザイナイメーシンのXLR。BAJAのデュアルヘルムなんといっても、35W X デュアルヘッドライトを装備しているの、ハードなナイトランを含むオフロードライディングに最適なBAJA。それが89 XLRのベグに最適。BAJAといえるが、なんとBAJAにはXR用のオイルクーラーが標準装備。一枚上手の走り楽向けの仕様なのだ。開変を切り裂きながら突き進むその姿は、色だが、なんといってもまよりに、いや、フロントヘビィだが、操安性は長好でサス設定もベストだ。ライターのアクセルを開きみて、行けばOK。木柱のクイトレノスでも好成績をおさめる。あとこれがないマシンだ。

XLR-BAJA主要諸元

| | |
|------------|----------------------|
| 全長×全幅×全高 | 2,155×800×1,100mm |
| 燃費最高 | 20km/l |
| シート高 | 800mm |
| 排気管(乾重) | 11kg |
| エンジン型式 | 250cc 4バルブ 4バルブ 4バルブ |
| 総排気量 | 249cc |
| 最大吸入ロウ | 24.9cc |
| モーターレター | 24.9cc |
| 最高出力 | 28ps (8500rpm) |
| 最大トルク | 2.3kgm (2500rpm) |
| 駆動方式 | チェーン |
| 変速方式 | マニュアル |
| 点火機 | CDI |
| ライト | デュアル |
| フレーム形式(円) | ダブル |
| タイヤサイズ(円) | 18インチ |
| クワイアサイズ(円) | 18インチ |
| 価格 | 398,000円 |

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HONDA XLR250R BAJA

on the XLR. Travel is just under 9.5 inches and 8.7 inches for the front and rear, respectively.

Instead of the squeak-o-matic rear drum, the XLR has a rear disc brake! The swing-arm is the same length as the XR unit, but there are changes for the caliper mounts. It also comes with passenger pegs. IRC Trail Winner tires handle traction duties and the front brake is identical to the XR unit. For street legality, trick-looking dual high-/low-beam headlights (12-volt, 35-watt), taillights, brake lights, tucked-in turn signals (on rubber mounts), a horn, two socket-mounted mirrors, brake-light switches, resettable speedometer/odometer (in kilometers), steel gas tank and the usual array of idiot lights grace the XLR. With all these add-ons, the bike weighs only 11 pounds more than its XR cousin.

The aforementioned items make the XLR street-legal in Japan, but many American states require that the headlights remain on without the motor running. Riders in these locales would have to hide a small battery in the large fender pack and run the positive wire to the ignition switch to pass this test. Also, this is a "gray market" machine sold as an off-road bike, but the owner can



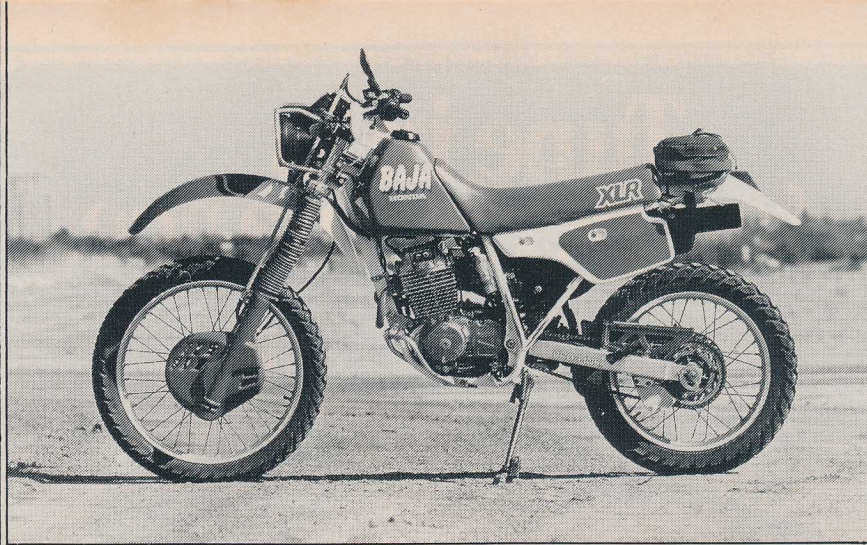
IRC Trail Winner dual-sport tires limit turning ability in sand and mud, but the XLR is a blast to ride on fire roads and hard-packed trails. Overall gearing is taller than the XR250R, so more clutch work is needed.

take his manufacturer Statement of Origin to the DMV and register the bike for street use with minimal effort. Hey, it's a lot easier than building it yourself and *then* getting it registered, as Japan's emission standards are tougher than ours.

Since the motors are identical on the XLR and XR, Al Baker's XRs Only has all sorts of performance mods in stock for the XLR, as do many other aftermarket companies. If you know someone who has bought an aftermarket silencer for his XR250R, you can inexpensively gain more performance by swapping mufflers and removing the XR diffuser for more flow, but noise output increases.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

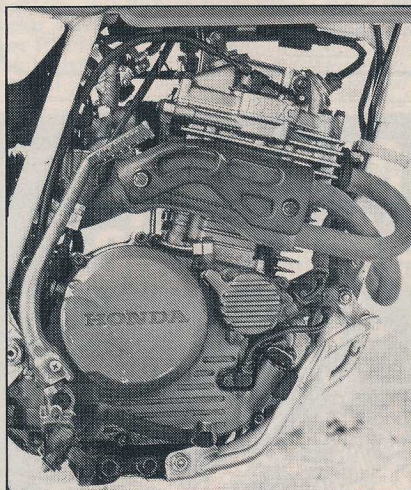
Because of the taller gearing, the XLR doesn't come out of the hole as strong as the XR, but tenth-mile drag times are only 0.3 seconds slower than the XR. With this



1989 HONDA XLR250R BAJA

Engine type Single-cylinder, air-cooled, SOHC, four-valve, four-stroke
 Displacement 249cc
 Bore and stroke 73mm x 59.5mm
 Carburetion 30mm Keihin PD
 Fuel tank capacity 2.3 gals. (9L)
 Transmission 6-speed
 Gearing, front/rear 15/40 (428)
 Wheelbase 56.8 in. (1444.5mm)
 Ground clearance 11.2 in. (284.5mm)
 Seat height 33.8 in. (858.5mm)
 Tire size and types:
 Front 3.00x21 IRC Trail Winner 4-ply
 Rear 4.60x18 IRC Trail Winner 4-ply

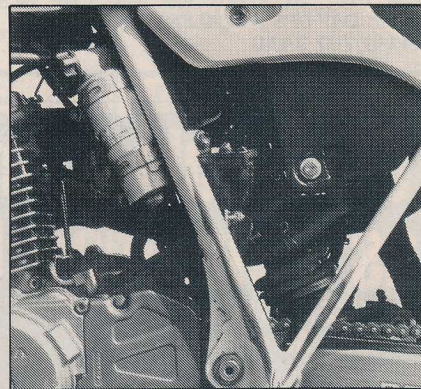
Suspension:
 Front Showa hydraulic forks, 9.45 in. (240mm) travel
 Rear Pro-Link, Showa remote reservoir w/ adj./comp. and preload, 8.66 in. (220mm) travel
 Claimed dry weight 250.8 lbs. (114kg)
 Actual dry weight 258.5 lbs. (117.6 kg)
 Country of origin Japan
 Suggested retail price \$3540 (plus freight)
 Distributor/Manufacturer:
 XRs Only
 6944 Santa Fe Ave.
 Hesperia, CA 92345
 (619) 244-2626



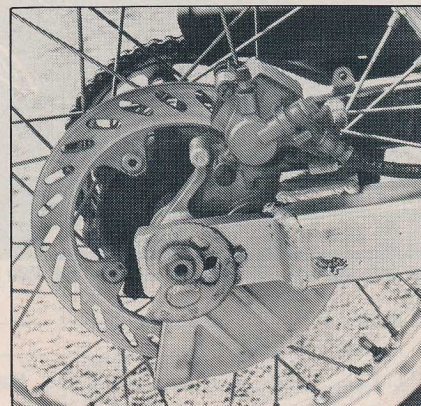
Aside from an emissions canister, 428 chain and non-removable muffler baffle for meeting Japanese laws, the XLR motor is exactly the same as the XR250R. This motor thrives on abuse and revs to a top speed of 87 mph.



An analog speedometer with resettable odometer reads kilometers; as long as you remember that 55 mph equals 88 km/h, all is well. The socket-mounted mirrors swivel instead of snapping when you crash. The dual-lamp headlight is trick.

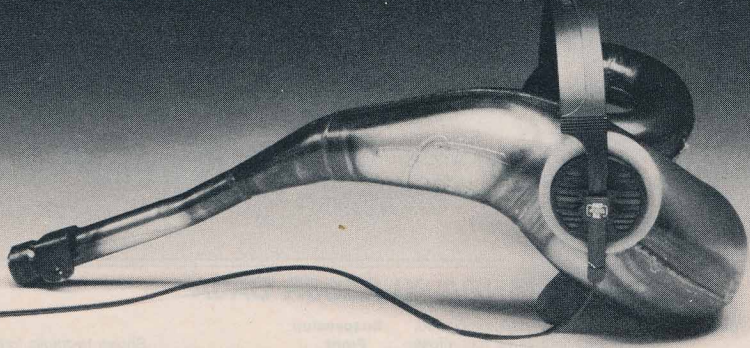


Although the remote-reservoir shock looks just like the XR unit, the XLR doesn't feature nearly as many compression adjustments or travel and it isn't adjustable for rebound at all. Action is soft.



Yes, a rear disc comes stock on the XLR! A drum is plenty for the dirt, but the demands of street riding require the Nissan disc. The 428 chain cuts drive-by noise levels and the hub is cushioned.

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HONDA XLR250R BAJA

gearing, the XLR is 3 mph faster than the NX250's top speed of 84 mph. Obviously, the taller first gear doesn't allow the XLR to plonk down quite as low as the XR, but the wider spread (due to the taller ratio) allows the XLR rider to wind each gear longer.

On the street, the IRC tires are excellent and they do a decent job of gripping hard-packed and moist dirt, but they (like most dual-sport meats) don't bite well in sand or mud. However, cornering is very good, and the lower seat height also comes in handy when dabbing over tricky sections. The XLR doesn't soak up whoops or jumps as well as its pure-dirt brother, but it doesn't do anything really ugly. Due to the added weight on the triple clamps, steering is a tad sluggish, but the bike is very easy and enjoyable to ride.



Travel limiters drop suspension travel from the 11" XR range to 9.5" and 8.6", front and rear, but the bike will stand up to abuse like its pure dirt brother. We bottomed the bike repeatedly with no failures.

On the street, long downhills or fast fire roads, the no-fade rear brake is worlds better than the smallish XR rear drum, and brakesliding into corners is very predictable. In fact, we prefer the XLR over the XR on hard-packed fire roads, due to the lower CG, taller gearing and more predictable tires and brakes. As long as you respect the comparative limitations in whoops and jumps, the XLR performs like its XR brethren and is a very dirt-worthy dual-sport. It flat blows away the NX250 and outshines the XLs in all situations, and it offers more torque and agility than the Kawasaki KLR250.

IMPORT DUAL-SPORT

Honda's meant-for-Japan XLR250R is the best 250-class dual-sport we have ever thrown a leg over, and a few mods could make it the ultimate lightweight street-legal dirt bike. It's quick, nimble and reliable, and parts (except the final drive) are interchangeable with the XR, but the performance and uniqueness do have their costs. The bike retails for 439,000 yen in Japan, which converts to \$3540 at today's exchange rate, plus the buyer has to pay freight (around \$300 from Japan to your door) to America. That puts the cost at \$700 more than the NX and \$1,000 above the KLR. Is it worth it? You bet! □

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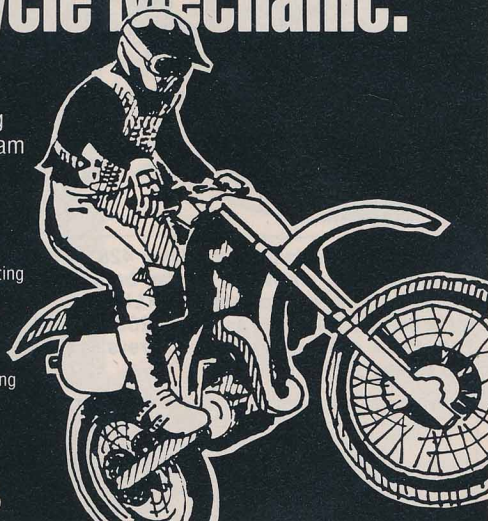
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