



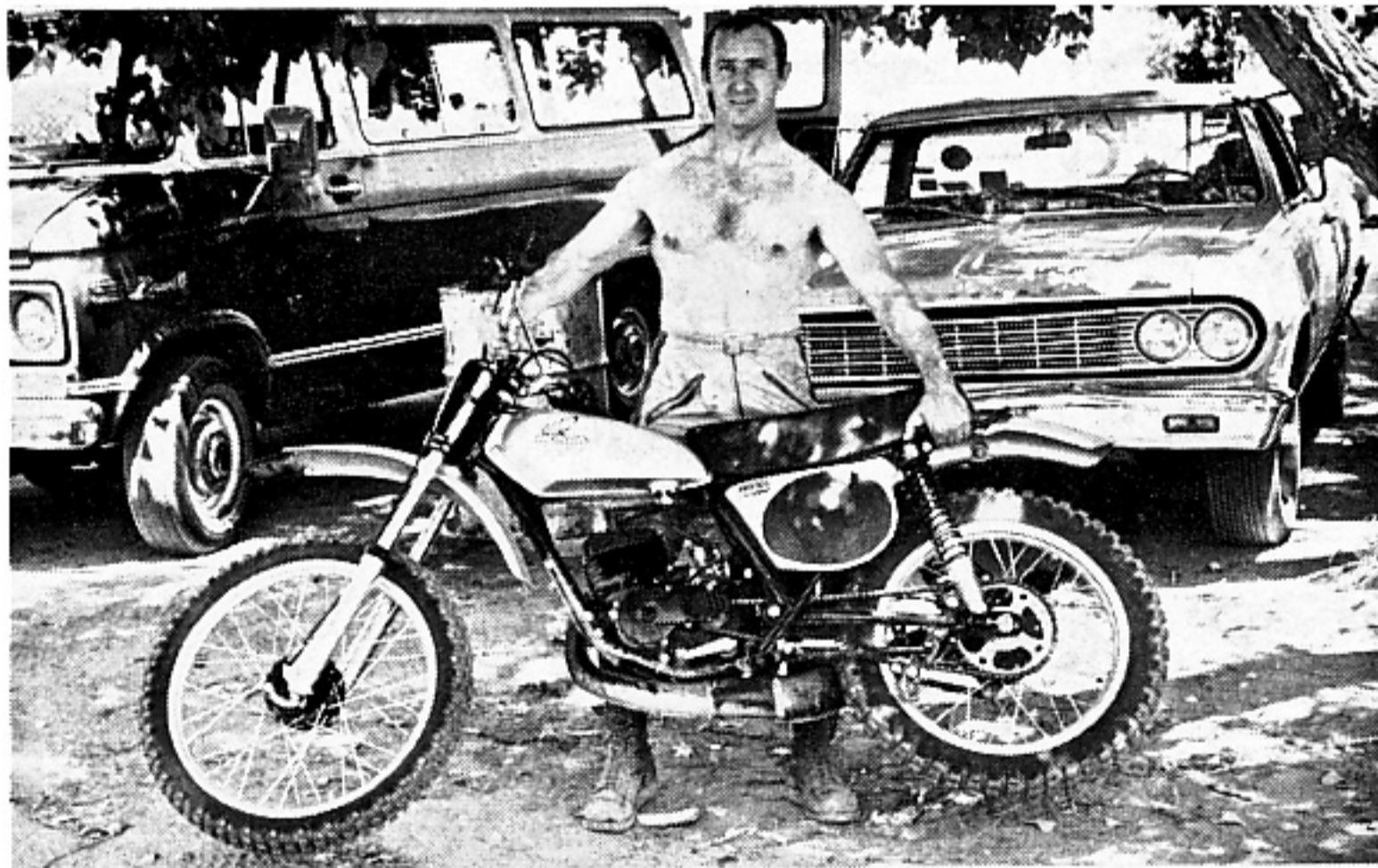
By the Staff of DIRT BIKE

HONDA CR125M SIX-SPEED

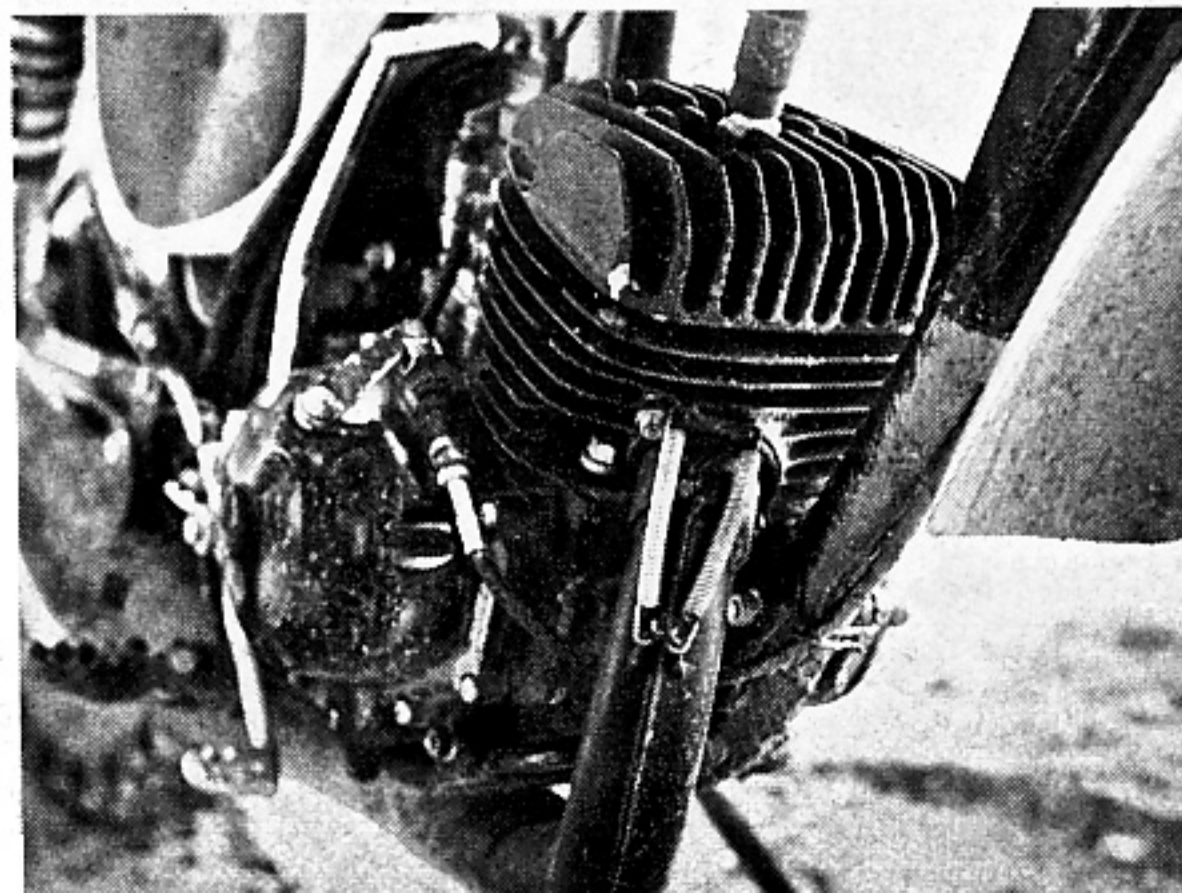
Good enough to win in the 250 class

Woe be unto the 125 class buyer. It is now officially Decision Time. We'll take it for granted that you want to win, and you want to spend as little as you have to in order to win (or do reasonably well) in that class.

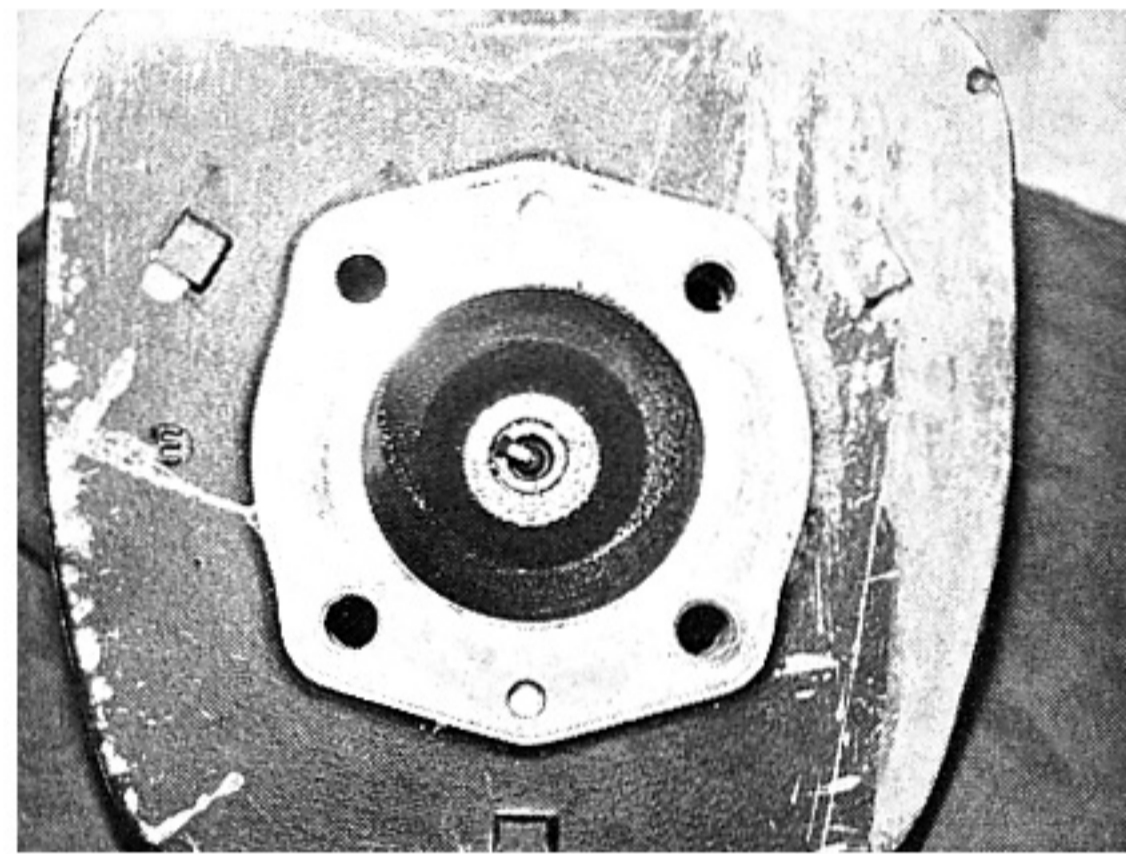
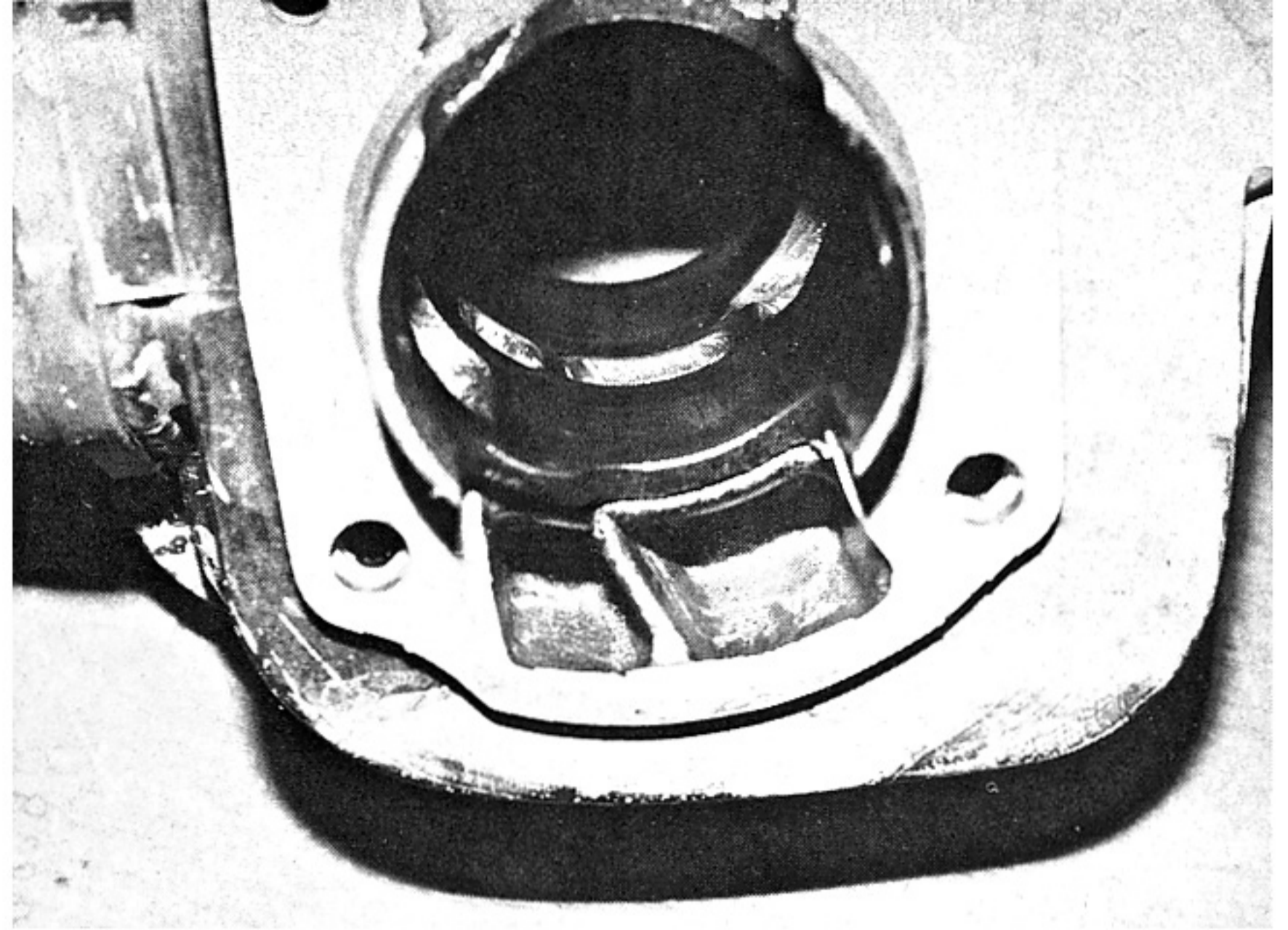
Up until now, you've been faced with several alternatives; let's examine a few of them in retrospect: (A) Buy the acknowledged speedster in the class—the Bultaco 125, and learn to live with its mechanical suicide tendencies. If it runs, nothing can keep up with it. (B) Buy one of the many Sachs or Zundapp-engined specials and spend a chunk of money for additional preparation: weight savings, gear-box hassles, good shocks, etc. (C) Buy a Japanese budget-crosser and learn to live with the less than perfect handling, or spend a fortune trying to make it handle. And usually fail. (D) Buy a Husky or CZ. With the 125 CZ, you'll spend most of the next year trying to get the lard off. With the Husky, you'll be in pretty good shape if the gearbox stays put, but it is not as fast as a Bul and weighs slightly too much.



New CR125 Honda is ultra-light, as proved by resident staff tester/bouncer.

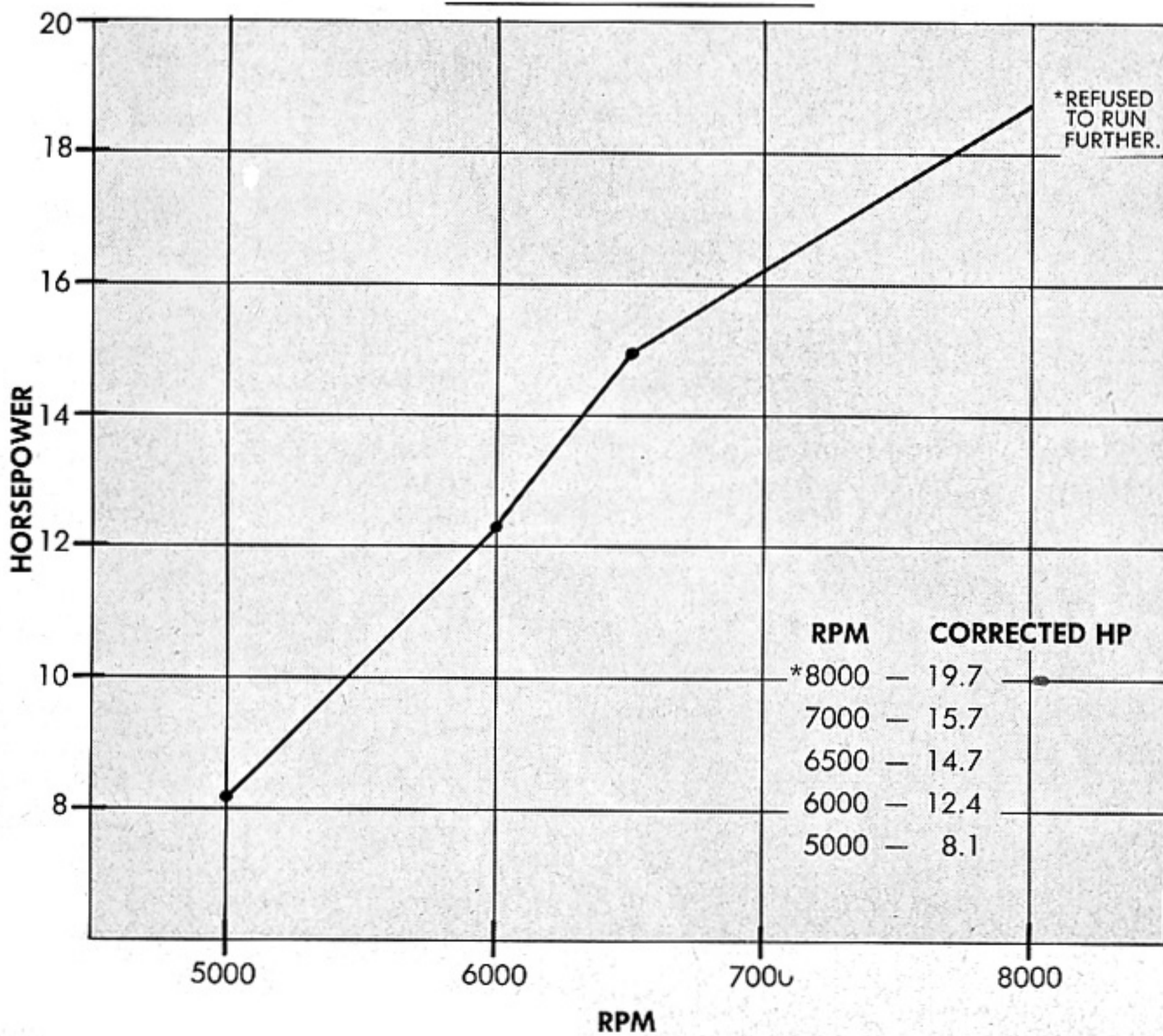


Engine is compact and very, very light.



Nothing magical is inside 125 powerplant - just good solid engineering and smooth execution.

HONDA ELSINORE 125 CR.



Plus the thing (as with most of the good ones) is frightfully expensive. (E) Buy a Hodaka and have a lot of fun cheaply and take a lot of third and fourth place trophies. It isn't fast enough in stock trim and if you modify it, reliability goes out the door. (F) Buy a 250 and forget this class. (G) Buy a 125 Suzuki MX and fiddle with the forks and calm the handling down some. (H) Buy a 400 and forget this *and* the 250 class. (I) Try to buy a 125 Honda and live happily ever after.

The important word here is "try."

Unless you are very, very lucky, you'll not be one of the lucky ones to get your sweaty little zipper grabbers on a CR125. At least not this year.

They already have deposits on hundreds of the beasts, and they don't even know the retail price as of this writing. We suspect it'll be around a thousand bucks . . . even if it were 1200 bucks, it would be the 125 to buy.

HONDA 125

PRICE: N/A

ENGINE TYPE: Single cylinder,
two-cycle

DISPLACEMENT: 123cc

BORE & STROKE: 56mm x 50mm

COMPRESSION RATIO: 7.6 to 1

CARBURETION: PW 28 Keihin

HP @ RPM: (claimed) None
(actual) 19.7 @ 8000

—taken at counter-
shaft sprocket

CLUTCH: Wet, Multi-plate

PRIMARY DRIVE: Gear, 4.00 to 1

FINAL DRIVE: Exposed chain,
3.5 to 1 ratio

GEAR RATIOS: 1. 2.133 to 1

2. 1.611 to 1

3. 1.300 to 1

4. 1.091 to 1

5. 0.958 to 1

6. 0.880 to 1

AIR FILTRATION:

Oiled foam, washable

ELECTRICAL SYSTEM:

Internal rotating electronic
magneto

LUBRICATION: Pre-mix @ 20 to 1

RECOMMENDED FUEL:

91 octane low-lead

RECOMMENDED OIL:

Shell Super M

FUEL CAPACITY: 1.6 gallons

FRAME: Semi-double cradle,
chrome molybdenum

SUSPENSION:

(Front) Tele-draulic, 7.1-inch
travel

(Rear) Hydraulic, 4.1-inch travel

TIRES: Front: 2.75x21

Rear: 3.50x18

WHEELS: Front: DID alloy rims

Rear: DID alloy rims

DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase: 53.5 inches

Ground Clearance: 7.9 inches

Seat Height 32.3 inches

Weight:

(claimed) 180 pounds

(actual) 188 pounds with

½-tank of gasoline

On front wheel: 83 pounds

On rear wheel 101 pounds

BRAKES:

Front: Internal expanding shoe,
13.4 square inch swept area

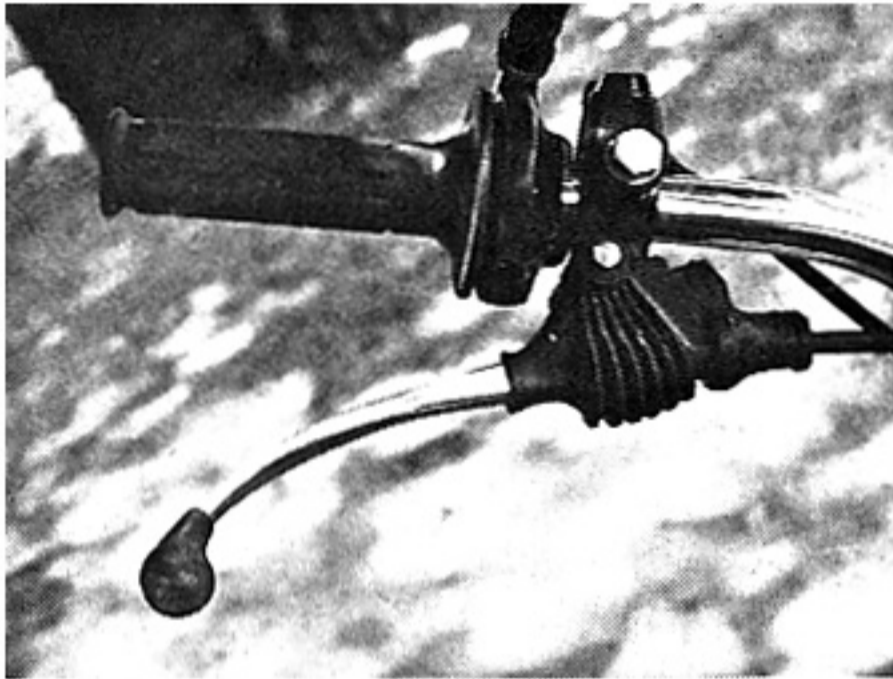
Rear: Internal expanding shoe,
13.4 square inch swept area

INSTRUMENTS: None

SILENCER: Yes, very loud

PRIMARY KICK: Yes

PARTS PRICES: N/A



Neat covers protected workings of levers.

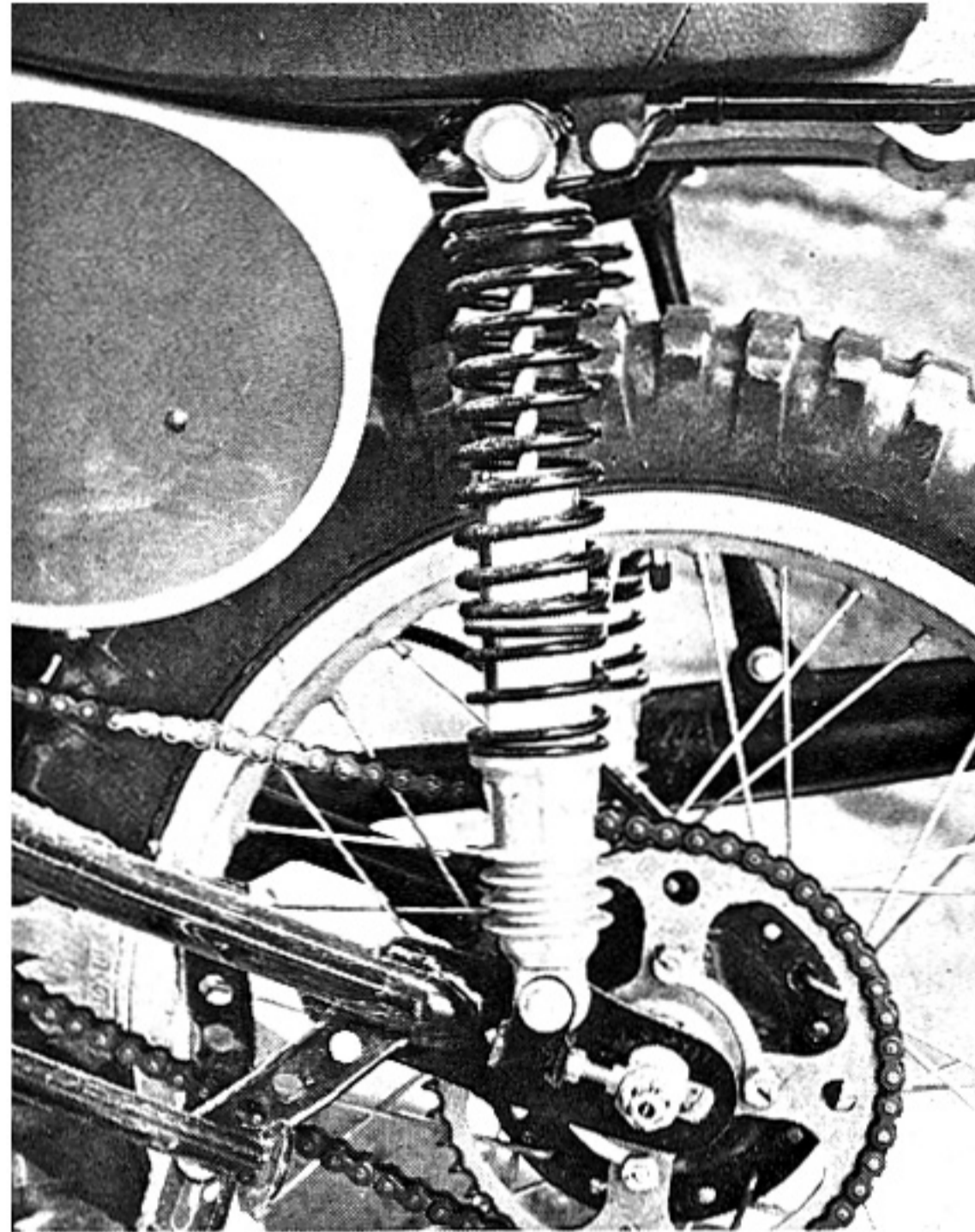
And the reason is simple: It is the best damn 125 you can buy, regardless of price. Spend a few hours on a CR125, then hop on your buddy's DKW. It'll feel ponderous.

Ride some more, then hop on a trick Bul. The CR125 will pull right alongside the faster Buls and smoke the average ones.

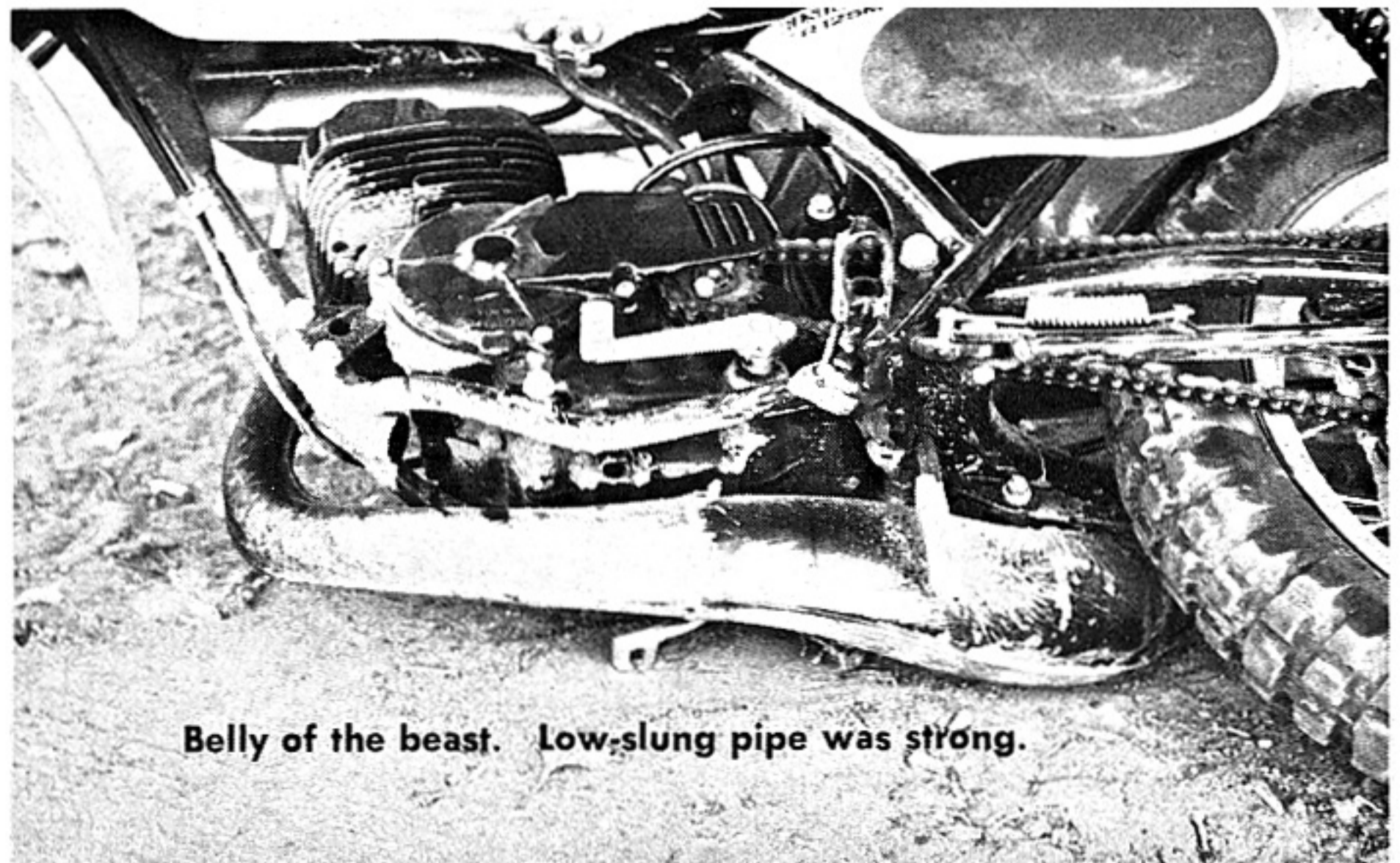
The CR125 is as fast (if not faster) than anything in its class and handles as good (if not better) than any bike ever built.

DIRT BIKE is the last outfit in the world to wax enthusiastic about a bike unless it really earns it. This bike earns it. Even the 250 Elsinore (June '73 DB) feels clumsy next to the 125.

Our collective minds were blown even before we rode the bike. When George Ethridge (Honda's answer to Mary Worth) brought the 125 out, he picked it up bodily off the trailer like it was a Schwinn. Gad! It must be light, our razor minds jointly assumed.



Shocks were as good as anything on the market.



Belly of the beast. Low-slung pipe was strong.



And it is. Fully gassed, with oil in all the nooks and crannies and tubes and orifices, the CR125 still tapes in at under 190 pounds. Dry, the 125 is right at the FIM 125 class minimum of 177 pounds. It is illegal to be any lighter under those august international rules. It is, however, possible to lighten the bike under FNB rules (Friendly Neighborhood Bike). Just imagine. A plastic tank, plastic levers, aluminum sprocket, etc., etc. Good lord!

But why bother? The machine is fantastic as is. And anyone other than a national-caliber racer would not benefit measurably from additional lightening.

Our test bike fired after three kicks (from cold) and first kick every time thereafter. Leg effort required was minimal. In fact, one of the bulkier editors pushed it through with his hand and the thing fired up.

Winging the throttle while the bike is warming up is an experience. Not much more than an eighth turn is required to get the engine shrieking. Throttle reaction is almost instantaneous. It's obvious that not much in the way of a flywheel is there to hinder rpm buildup. This kind of reaction on a larger bike would kill you several times, but when you're dealing with only 7½ cubic inches, it's the only way to go.

Flicking the bike from side to side (while we got up to proper operating temperature) emphasized its lightness. That juncture at the gas tank and seat is very narrow and you know the Honda will be an easy bike to stand up on.

It took a long time for the CR125 to warm up—but that's good. That means that it'll also take the bike a long time to get hot. If it ever does.

Finally, it reached the right temp, and we stomped down for low on the ultra-neat aluminum shift lever. No graunch, no lurch. Just a nice smooth engagement. Clutch action was ('scuse the expression) feather-light and engaged about halfway out, like a well-mannered clutch ought to.

We knew this was a peaky racer, so the powerplant was strung out to some high revs and the clutch fed out like a road racer. Surprise number one: Even though it's a racer, it's not all that peaky.

We made a dash from the starting line (on the MX course) to the first

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Axle location ala Maico. Looked good — worked good.



turn. Acceleration was 'crisp,' with a nice punch at the end of the powerband. The front end wanted to come up. We slid forward some and it cured that for the balance of the day.

Bang, bang, bang. We slipped through the gears easily and entered the first turn well up in fifth gear, with one more gear on tap. Wow! If your 250 isn't running right, you won't beat this bike to the corner.

As the bike entered the first right-hander, the thought struck home that rider and machine were traveling very, very quickly. Quick enough to make the corner a "maybe" proposition. A furtive glance revealed not one decent berm in sight. Oh well. Take it like a man, and give it a try.

The Honda was pitched down on its side and power applied. (For it is written, 'tis better to lowside than to highside. *How To Win At Racing*, Chapter 6, psalm 14.)

As the bike reached the limit of traction, it naturally started to slide out, but a foot was kept planted. It reached the apex of the turn and threatened to slide off the track. Desperation made the rider yank on the bars and the bike moved *back over* towards the center of the turn, got a good bite and hooked it like a dirty dog.

This machine could be literally picked up and placed wherever the rider desired. As more and more laps were put on the Honda, it became apparent that the handling was the strongest point of the machine. It was a positive joy to toss the little sucker right down on the peg and keep the handle turned aaaaalllll the way on. Wanta change your line? No sweat. Blip the throttle and point the front wheel in the intended direction of flight. Somehow, somehow, the bike responds and heads for The Line.

Peaky bikes are usually a pure bitch to slide, mostly because of the narrow powerband. Our test bike had a relatively broad 3000 rpm operating range—from 5000 to 8000. While it was possible to pull slightly below 5000, there was not enough strength there to write home to Mother about. Keep it buzzing for best results.

That light weight invited show-off stuff from the rider. Everybody was popping wheelies and slippee-slidee-slithering around the track. It felt like you could *not* fall off. Even stodgy-type riders were lifting the front whilst coming down steep hills. Point a camera at damn near any test rider, and he'd pick the front end up. It got nauseating after a while.

At our first session, we had six riders present to wring out the bike. Getting a ride on the CR125 proved difficult. The only sure way of getting a ride on the scoot was waiting until the current rider ran out of gas, then holding on to the gas can when he came pushing the bike into the pits. We almost had to shoot Old Buddy Tom off the Honda.

Unlike the 250 Honda that required a savvy rider to go quickly, almost anybody could go fast on the CR125. But once they got off the bike, everything else felt clumsy. The machine spoils you. Spoils you bad. It's 20 to 30 pounds lighter than anything in its class, and feels like a feather when compared to a normal 250 or 400.

Because of the light weight, handling can be changed easily from one trait to another with minimal body shifts. Sit in the normal position and both wheels will break loose at the same time when the limit of traction is reached. Move forward slightly, and the front end will bite and hold like a half-miler. For best traction out of a corner, lean back a hair and the weight transfer minimizes wheelspin and maximum forward thrust is achieved. It doesn't take gymnastics, either. Just the bare minimum of movement gets the job done.

Nothing gets in your way as the bike is ridden, unless you have large feet. More specifically, a large right foot. The exhaust pipe exited aft of the footpeg and made contact with the gunboats in the crowd. We suspect, however, that not too many riders in the 125 class will be sporting size 11½ shoes. A gentle whack with a hammer could have solved the clearance problem, but then, it wasn't our bike.

Pegs are quite low and when the bike is leaned over hard, it's best to stick the old leg out there in the breeze. Several riders reported scuffing the ground with the edge of their riding boots.

At first, one tends to miss the brake pedal, as it's tucked in very close to the side of the case. But after a few laps—no sweat. Brakes, by the way, are superb. They feel as strong as those on any good Yamaha, but are far less prone to unwanted lock-up. We couldn't get the rear wheel to chatter under severe braking and it took just the right amount of foot pressure to operate.

One or two fingers did the job on the front brake, and it worked as good as anything we've ever tried. Even a few passes through the water didn't cause more than minimal fade. Two hard applications brought them back to full strength. Other than the 250 Elsinore, and the 125CR, we have never found any cable-operated rear brakes that we liked.

With a six-speed 125 you're going to spend a lot of time shifting. Owners of Sachs-engined bikes lie awake at night trembling because of this fact. Honda owners will sleep well. A short throw is all that's needed and engagement is crisp. The only time we missed gears was when climbing up a very long hill. If the rider waited too long and attempted to shift down under a load, the shift from second to first was often missed. To get around this hassle, it was necessary to shift before the revs dropped much.

BITS AND PIECES ON THE CR125

Unlike the 250, the 125 has a steel gas tank and it holds 1.6 gallons of pre-mix. This machine is a genuine racer and you won't find an oil injection unit bolted on. Which we think is just fine.

A 28mm Keihin carb allows the bike to idle as smoothly as any street bike. Our test bike never loaded up or became balky to start. This is a good jug.

One hassle showed at the other end of this carb—the air cleaner. It's the "fuzzy-foam" variety that is becoming common on many Japanese MXers these days. When we serviced the filter, much of the hair came off. It made our hands look like a pool table top that had been left out in the rain. We feared that some of the fuzzy stuff might clog a carb jet, but nothing ever happened. Still, it's a problem that needs correcting.

Honda recommends 91 octane low-lead gas with a bean oil. We recommend that you don't believe this, and use a good petroleum oil and high test gas. Our test bike performed *much* better using the good stuff.

Like its big brother, the 125 sports DID alloy rims front and rear. After one spoke-tightening session, we had zero hassle with the wheels. They are first-rate items.

A 2.75x21 tire is up front and we would not recommend that a fatter cross-section be used. However, one might consider going to something bigger than the 3.50x18 on the rear. There's enough power present to pull more meat.

No flex was detected in the frame—which is no big surprise, as it's made of chrome moly, a rare thing on 125 racers. Only Penton, Husky and one or two others share this feature.

Suspension is absolutely fantastic No one will be selling shocks to Honda 125 owners. They would only bottom over the genuinely gruesome potholes, and even then, not badly. And many of our test riders are of the large economy size. A smaller (lighter) rider should be perfectly delighted with their performance.

Forks transmitted very little shock to arms and shoulders and absorbed all the grim stuff without any shuddering or twisting. Some riders felt that small ripple bumps were not followed as faithfully as should be, but all agreed that they would leave the forks on the bike, and experiment with different oils. Taken as a whole, the suspension package is one of the most sophisticated on the market.

Nothing leaks on the bike. Nothing. This is as it should be. We hope the rest of the whole line of leaky bikes listens to this. There is no longer any excuse for sloppy workmanship or materials.

Bars are the right shape—everyone liked them. No need to pop hard-earned money for new ones. Grips are also good and look like the famed Dohertys.

All the million and one little things on the bike are done well. Tabs, brackets, cable holders, rubber booties and the like are done for the rider.

We had some problems with the rear wheel sprocket. One nut backed off and the through bolt sheared. Because we ran the bike an additional two weeks with only three bolts left, the remaining bolts finally went south. We feel the bolts should be stronger, or possibly that there be more of them.

The silencer doesn't do such a wonderful job of silencing, and the noise level emitted from the Honda is marginal. No better. When we dynoed the bike, none of the horsepower figures changed with the silencer on or off.

One thing on the dyno figures must be mentioned. After our first full day of riding, we headed for the dyno room, thoroughly satisfied with

the performance. After an initial run on the pump, we recorded a very respectable 17.6 horsepower at the countershaft sprocket, which is the same as a rear wheel reading. Just for the hell of it, we took a plug reading and the plug showed too rich. We found some Mikuni jets that fitted the Keihin carb and leaned it down some. Voila! After a few minutes of fiddling, we were able to pull 19.7 horsepower at 8000 rpm. A whole bunch more. The next time we rode the bike, the difference was astounding. What had previously been a very strong bike was now a rocket ship.

There were no jets available from Honda at the time, so our improvising was pure luck. If you see tests of the Honda 125 in other magazines that show the lower figure of 17 or so, then you will know that the bike was running way too rich. It's obvious that God was on our side.

SUMMATION

Simply put, this is the best 125 on the market. For motocross at least. It may not have enough low-end grunt for gnarly cross-country or desert, but the bike is a no-compromise MXer and makes no pretenses at being anything else.

We don't know what it'll cost, but a good guess would probably be around \$995. Even if it's more, the bike would still be the buy of the decade. Mostly because it truly *can* be raced right out of the crate. Honda is now left with only one problem. How are they going to make enough of them? The rest of the motorcycle manufacturers are left with another problem. What can they do to justify the existence of their offerings? They had damn well better respond with something. And they better do it quickly. ●