Perhaps it was best summed up ... when we asked ... the musical question ... are you guys trying to put everyone else out of the racing bike business?

"Nope, we're just going to make them get a whole lot better."

DIRT BIKE June, 1973

So here we sit some two years later and no, Honda didn't put anybody out of business and yes, almost everybody else did get a whole lot better. The natural progression of things? Response to the out-of-the-crate-ready-to-race raves the Elsinore received? Some of both? Swords or pistols?

Ironically, today it's the 125 Elsie that's the frontrunner. It's safe to say the market for CR250s has been a mite soft the last year.

Remember what it was like two years ago? Word leaked that Honda two-poppers were on the way. Rumor has it that the upper-ups were so concerned about tainting their image with a mere two-stroke that prototypes bore the name Elsinore only. About that name. Elsinore. Just why was a motocrosser named after a defunct Southern California Grand Prix? But, consider the alternatives. The Honda Hopetown, the CR250 Big Bear, the Honda Barstow to Vegas?

Glowing praise. The spring and summer of '73. Here's what DIRT BIKE had to say.

You beat the nicest people on a Honda.

It is so stunningly right as is that the mind wobbles.

With the outrageously long 57-plus-inch wheelbase, one would expect the Honda to be ponderous through the turns. Not so. Directional changes are ludicrously easy.

Mind tweaker!

Just about everybody confirmed it would beat anything except a hot 400. How about some words of wisdom from other publications?

The engine was not at all pipey.

We do agree that the Elsinore can be ridden a gear higher. We feel the excellent carburetion is responsible, rather than a "torquey" engine.

Its engine design hits the pro-

TWO YEARS LATER

verbial nail on the head by putting usable power everywhere in the rev range.

I didn't have to horse the bike around in the corners. Honda appears to have gotten the steering geometry just about right.

Geometry is perfect for its weight and powerband.

Updating the Mind-Tweaker

HONDA CR250M1 ELSINORE

by the Staff of DIRT BIKE

We've ridden some very good handling motocrossers and we feel the Honda is as good as any.

Its long wheelbase, low center of gravity and light weight make it easy to point in the other direction.

Initially it was a bit of a mystery why a machine with such a long wheelbase (57½ inches) and 5-7/8 inches of trail steered so amazingly well.

A long wheelbase, long trail bike will resist turning — unless it is used at speeds with exceptional throttle response and power. At slower speeds behaviour will not violate what the engineering books say, unless the throttle immediately dials in instant power so that the bike slides around rather than steers.

I wouldn't change a thing, except maybe the shift lever and the brake pedal, my feet are too big for them.

You really want to show that old "tell it like it is" flash and you get handed a machine you can't find anything wrong with.

Other than that (small gas tank opening) and an occasional kick from the starter, the bike is spot on.

Honda has succeeded in building a machine that should establish a new standard of quality and performance for the rest of the industry to set its sights on.

Most of the rest of the industry set its sights on the CR250's market. Some caught up. Some passed it. Two years is a long time to sit around with nothing new to sell.

The obvious question is, what was Honda doing during the two-year interval. Answer. Lots. Particularly about the two complaints that wiggled to the surface after the dust settled and all the mind-tweaker adjectives had spent their wad. The CR250 was a significant machine, it was ready to race out of the crate. In retrospect it did have two deficiencies. The thing wouldn't turn easily and the power was rather radical without the right kind of track surface to accommodate the mid-range explosion. Both of these areas received attention, and the bike also had its shocks moved up.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT

Kill button on the left side replaces kill switch on the right side.

Handlebars are black for glare reduction and/or visual splendor.

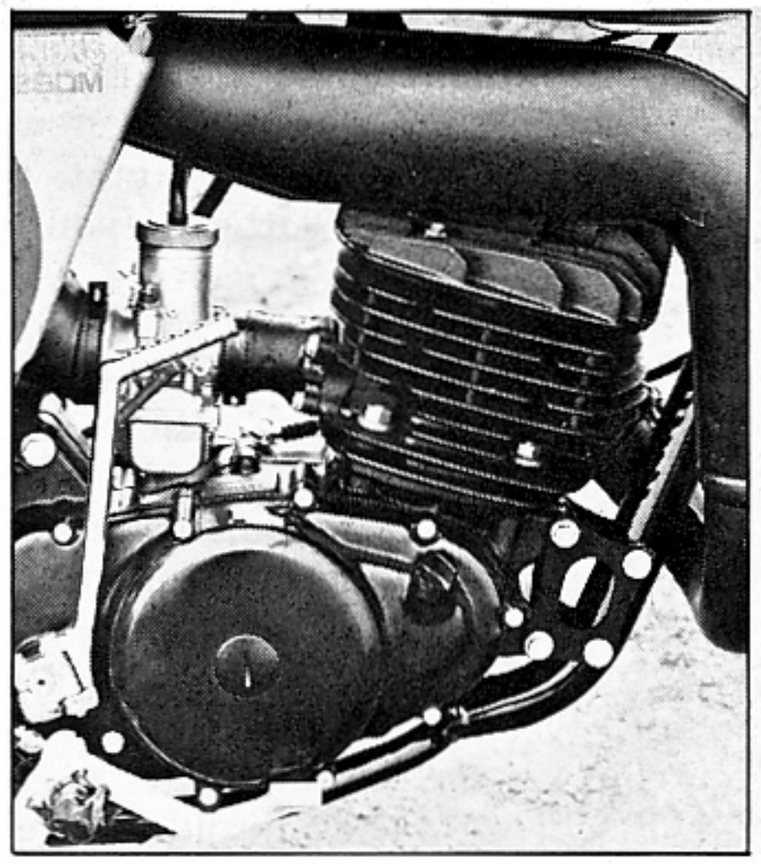
Plastic fenders are white. Front is extra-wide, looks serious, drew a lot of favorable comment.

Black rubber caps replace hexagonal fork caps. Supposedly they look prettier and they are lighter, but opening up the tubes for oil changes can be a hassle compared to the '73 model. Now there's internal snap rings that you need snap ring pliers to remove. Use care when removing the snap rings in the new fork tubes or you might get one in the face.

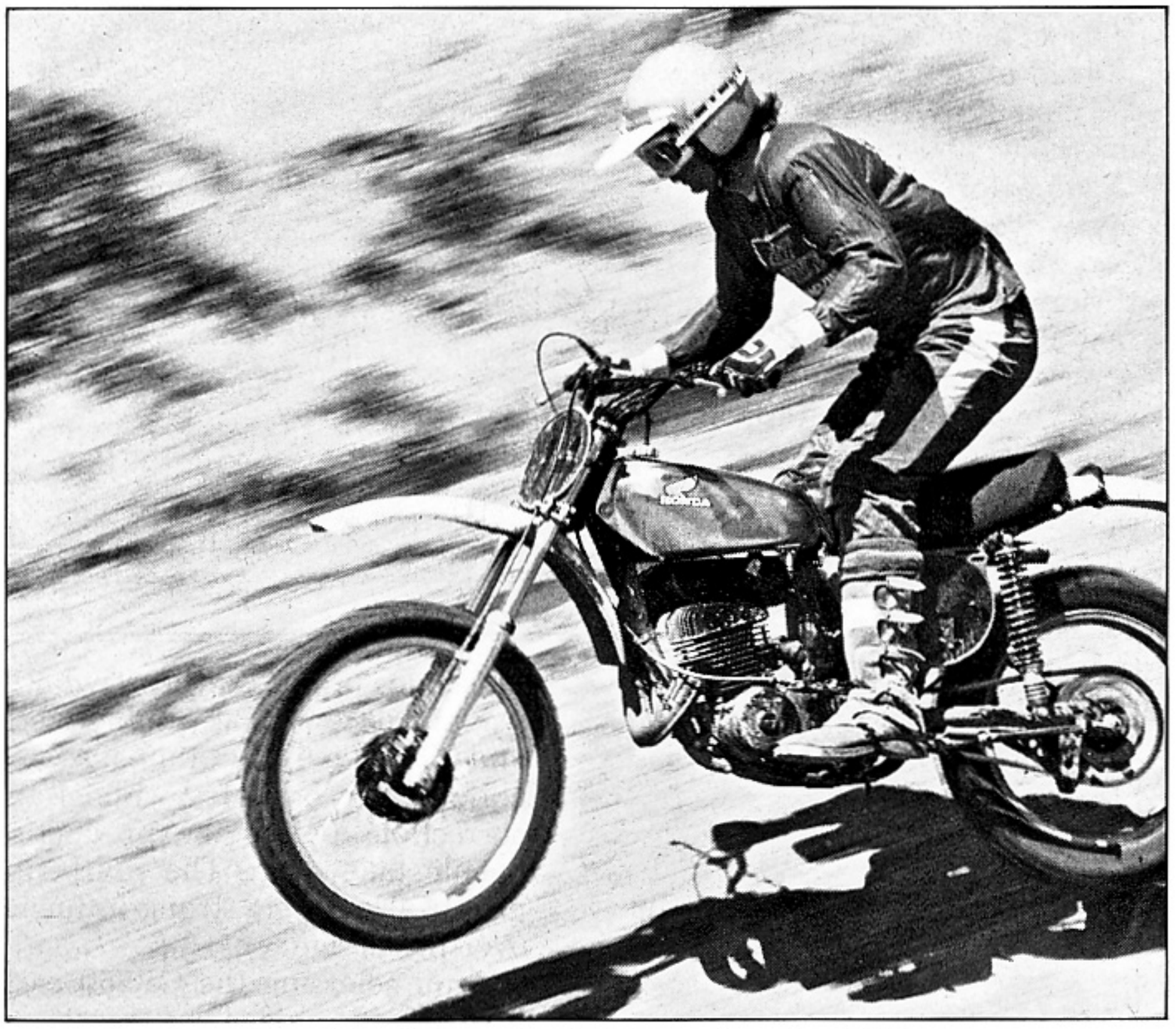
Cylinder and head vastly different externally. Porting changed, too. Nine holes now instead of eight. Five transfers.

There's an enclosed steel air box. Weighs about 3½ pounds. The right side panel can be removed after popping the stout rubber band, just as on the new 125s. Two Phillips head bolts secure the side of the box and one more releases the foam filter. Because of the tight fit of the box, inserting the filter is not exactly a snap.

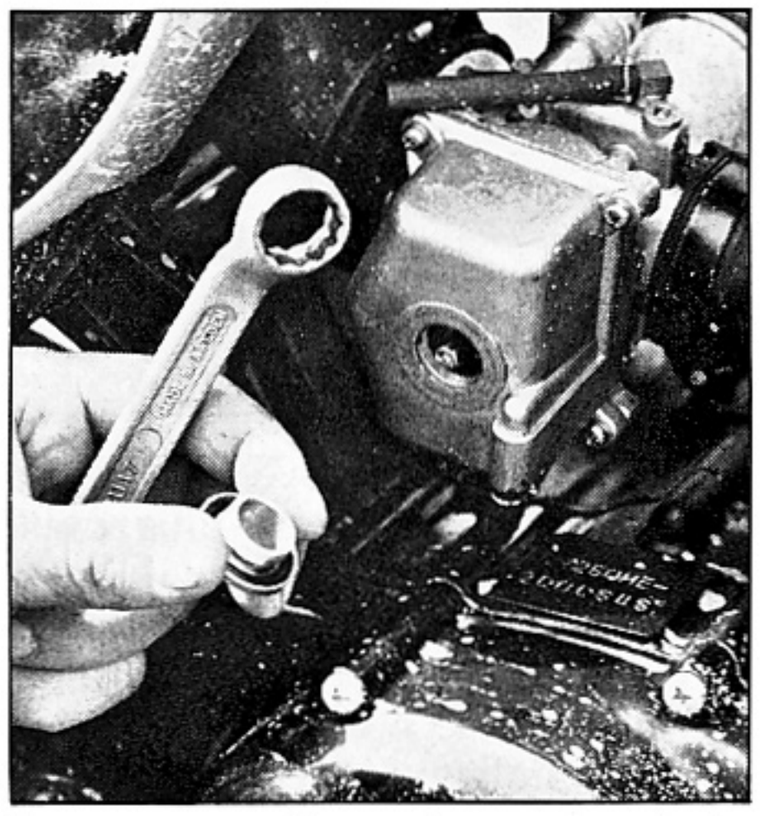
The shocks are forward mounted. We measured 6½ inches travel. Honda went to the vertical mounting method, moving the bottom mount forward four inches, the top 1¾ inches. The swingarm was shortened slightly and beefed up. Swingarm bushings are still non-metallic, but have been modified for closer tolerances. And Tom Sawyer still sells bronze bushings.



Cooling fins are smaller on right side to accommodate up-pipe.



Yumpin' yiminy. Staff token Swede photo.



Same easy twist and screw main jet change-over procedure.

There's a handily-located grease nipple at the front of the swingarm.

The kickstarter has been widened.

The seat is more substantial and cushier. Weighs a feathery 3 pounds, 6 ounces.

A one-piece crossover up-pipe, exiting on the left side just beyond the number plate. It slips off easily. There's a humongous accessory spark arrestor/silencer for folks who want or need a quieter ride. Only weighs 5½ pounds.

Colors. Green is gone. Red, black and silver, similar to the new 125 except for the white fenders.

Rubber intake manifold this year. Rubber's a good heat insulator and helps minimize carburetor vibration.

The right footpeg, as well as the left, is now welded to the frame instead of just bolted on. Pegs were lowered ¾-inch to a height of 12¼ inches.

Same fork dampers but a single heavy-wound spring replaces the two springs used previously. Heavier spring seems ideal for 180-pounders who go very fast.

Never-load-up carb about the same but the needle appears to be leaner on the bottom.

The rear brake anchor arm was shortened from 11 inches to 5½ inches. Regular Elsinore riders felt it induced some brake chatter in what was previously a fine brake setup.

Front brake is still super stopper. Both are water resistant.

Chain isn't the good (and also expensive) D.I.D. TM variety found on the '73 model.

Same rotor and points ignition. The rotor is now secured by a nut instead of a bolt. That's the reason for the change in the cover.

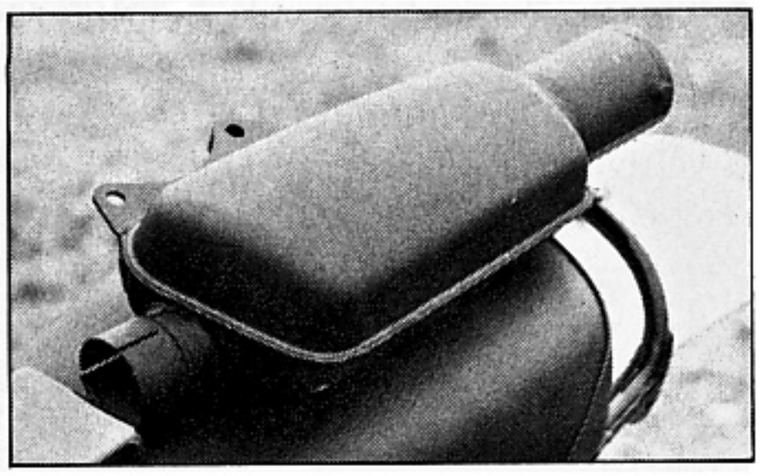
The rear sprocket is different. Concave. Looks expensive to replace.

Some of the geometry changes we noted. The engine was lowered 1½ inches and moved forward ¾-inch. This lowers the center of gravity and puts more weight on the front wheel for better turning. Ground clearance is almost ten inches even with the lower engine.

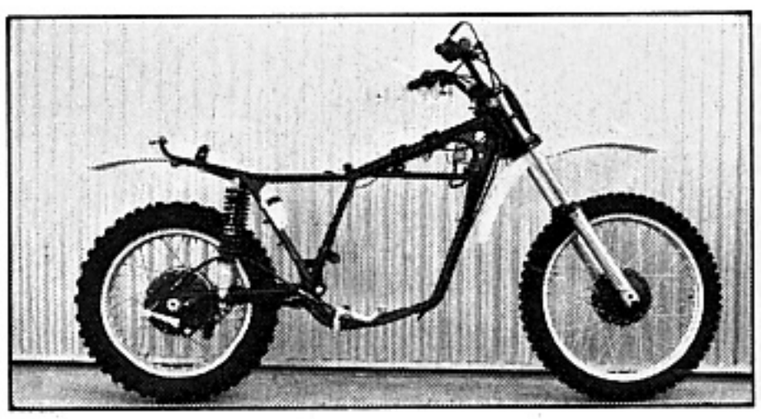
Fork angle is 32 degrees, about the same as the '73. Trail is about the same at 5.8 inches.

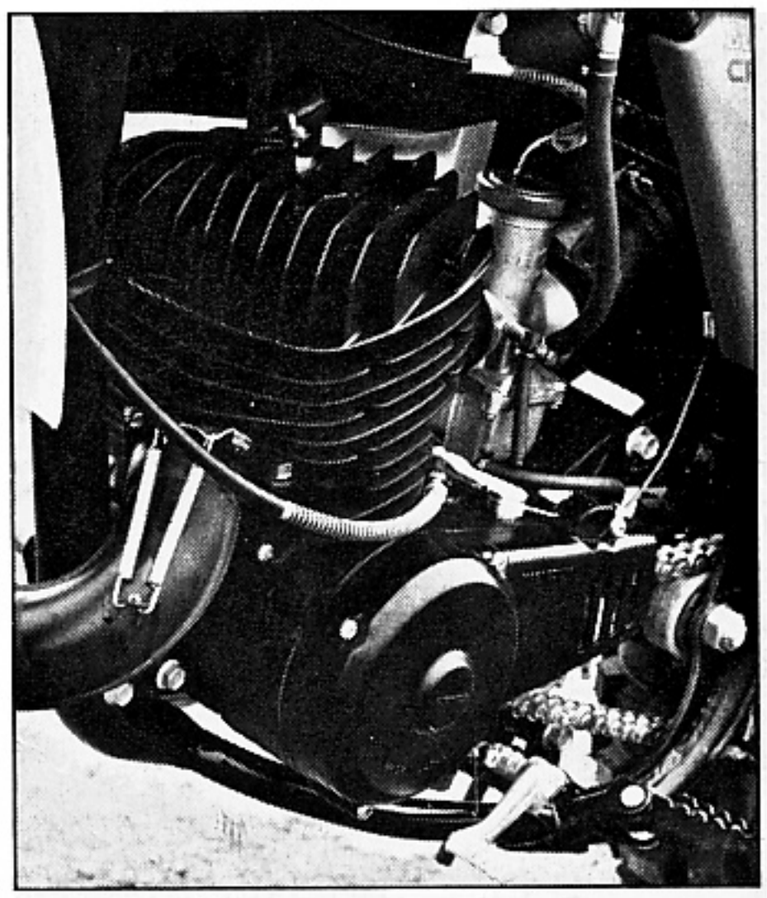
The triple clamp offset has been increased four millimeters to 56½mm for quicker steering.

What do all these changes add up

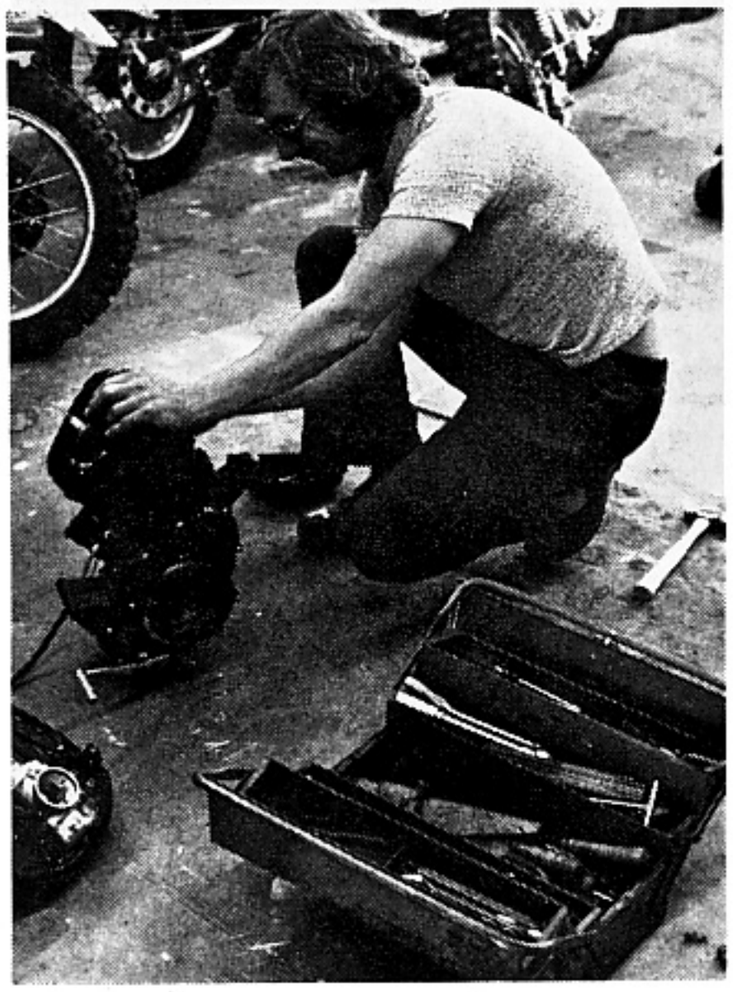


Accessory silencer/spark arrestor. It's as large as it looks, or maybe even larger.





Same rotor, but it's now held on with a nut that needs some more room in the points cover.



ELSIE EXECUTION

The impressive thing about Honda is the way their bikes are executed. The finished product is a together package that functions as the engineers conceived it. This doesn't always mean that the bike is 100-percent right, but the finished product is at least what it was meant to be. Everything works and it is obvious that time has been allowed for both test riding and corrections before the production people take over. The marketing people also have a strong influence over the design.

After releasing the CR250 early in 1973, Honda in a sense got caught with their pants down. They weren't the only ones. Here they were with this very up-to-date well-received new model and suddenly the development book took a major bound forward. We're speaking of the breakthrough in suspension and attitudes about what kind of power, not necessarily peak power, was needed to win in international competition. So there they were, thinking they had a bike to grab a good corner of the market for some time to come. Hence, no 1974 model.

Failure to participate in the GPs in Europe cost Honda many months of valuable time. It wasn't until the Trans-AMA in the fall of '73 that they got to see the trick European modifieds in action. Since then Honda has no doubt tried every design ever conceived for rear suspension. Yet when it came time for a new 1975 production model there was no significantly different approach ready. So they went with the same move-the-shocks-forward method that shops and riders had been using on the old Elsinores. Their new swingarm even looks like a shop gusseted item.

Long travel suspension created other problems. The low pipe was getting battered on hard landings, so an up-pipe became a necessity. The design of the pipe on the new CR is very simple, it's easily removed and nicely executed.

Altering the power was another major change. Although the old bike had hard acceleration and high horsepower output the power needed to be made wider and less radical for easier riding. The ports and the pipe were altered and, in

to out on the track? A sampling of comments: Fun. Doesn't turn like a real motorcycle. Quick power. Skips along, doesn't dig in. That's a good bike. Ride it like a 125. Decent but not spectacular. It's better than I thought it would be. Doesn't feel like it'll spit you off in a slide. Don't trust it when I'm sliding. Smooth power. The forks jolt you into reality. It's OK but it seems Japanese. It's competitive. Eh, it's OK, I guess. I like it. It's a good bike up to its limits — those limits are suspension. I'm going to buy one.

Get the picture? Some riders really dug it, particularly after we changed the suspension. Others remained lukewarm. It's a multiple-choice machine. Great. Good. Adequate. Pick one.

It definitely turns better. The increased triple clamp offset, the shorter wheelbase, the engine lower and further forward all help. The bike has a light, whippy feel and you can fling it into a turn like a 125 featherweight. But you still can't call it the zot turner of its class.

If the forks were a little softer it would corner better. We tried raising the fork tubes to see if it helped the cornering any. It did. This year there's just one notch (not five) for lining up the two tubes. We used the old eyeball-it technique and moved them up to the imaginary second notch. Nothing like a little experimenting.

The suspension contributes to this skipping rather than digging-in feel.

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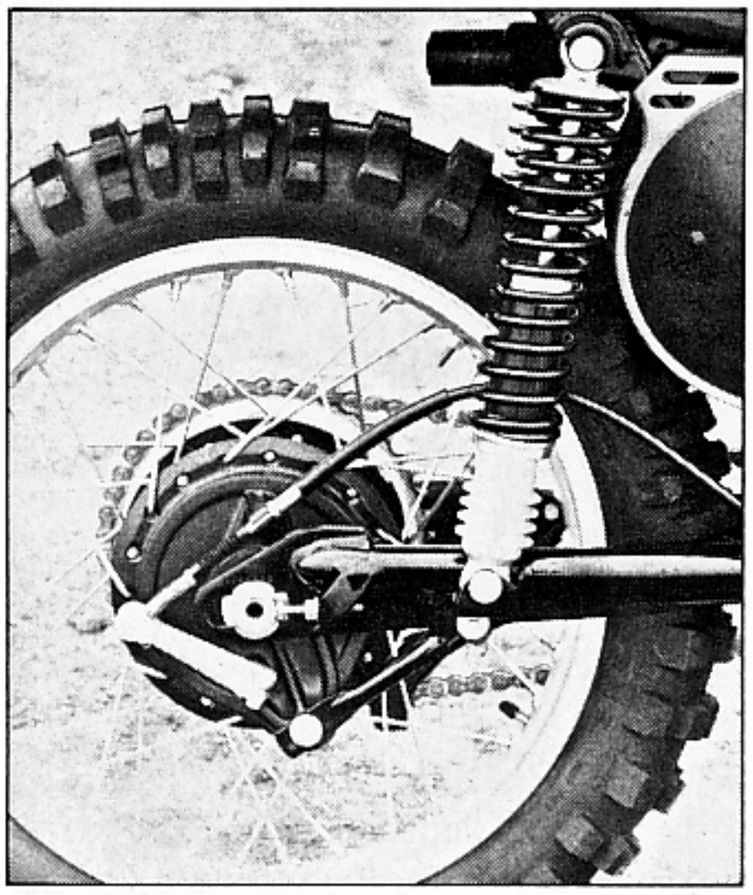


Notice shortened brake anchor arm and irregular Bridgestone knob pattern.

general, we think they achieved their goal except for one thing. Too little flywheel. This becomes evident in two ways. First, it's much too easy to kill the engine when going into turns and, secondly, it's easy to spin out during acceleration out of turns on smooth-surfaced tracks. If there's a berm or groove it's fine, but if there isn't the power still comes on in too much of a rush. But it's definitely improved when compared to the '73 unit's power rush.

This brings us to shifting. The transmission system is excellent, simple and light, but it is impossible to shift to the next gear without either using the clutch or backing off the throttle. The movement in the lever to effect gear changes is very minimal. It would be interesting to try to change the ratio between the lever and the movement of the shift fork to see if it would be easier to shift under load. This would also reduce the chances of accidentally knocking the transmission out of the selected gear. An upshift currently requires just 23mm of movement.

Two years from now we suspect that very few riders will know how to adjust a pair of points. There is no reason why Honda needs to use them on the CR250 when their 125 has a trouble-free CDI unit.

The CR has no locknuts of the type we are used to seeing on most European bikes nowadays. We aren't sure if we like all the Phillips head bolts. It doesn't have too many tools in the tool kit either, but the owner's manual is quite complete. There should be a wrench for the top steering head nut to eliminate the old hammer and punch deal.

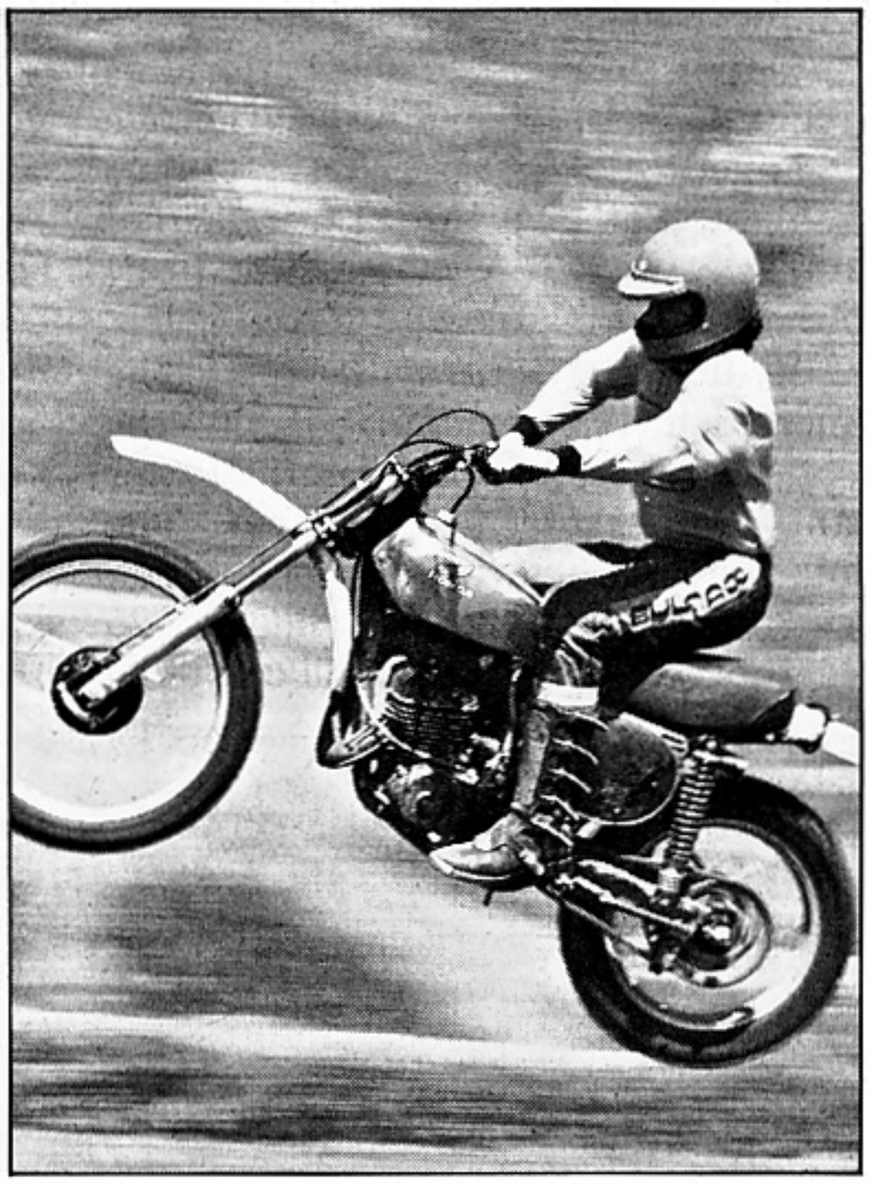
There are a lot of nice little touches on the bike. The nylon roller protector for the swingarm axle, the overflow tubes from the carb, and the very nice machining on the front and rear axles, works-like style.

We ran the bike with the needle all the way up and it was pinging a little at three-quarters open at times. We would have liked to try another needle jet or needle. We were told there were none available.

The levers, cables and twist grip are all first-class with the right leverage and movement, and the throttle spring is just the right tension. The lever covers are a drag when you have to try to pop the little rubber nubs back in their place after adjusting the cables.

Brakes are really first-class, and although we don't like rear brake cables, those on the Honda work fine. The offset rear sprocket puzzled us since the old bike had a flat one that worked fine.

So what do we have here? A bike that is finished in every detail, but maybe not quite finished when it comes to some of the major items such as flywheel weight, power range and suspension. Luckily, some of these can be altered or adjusted by the owner himself.

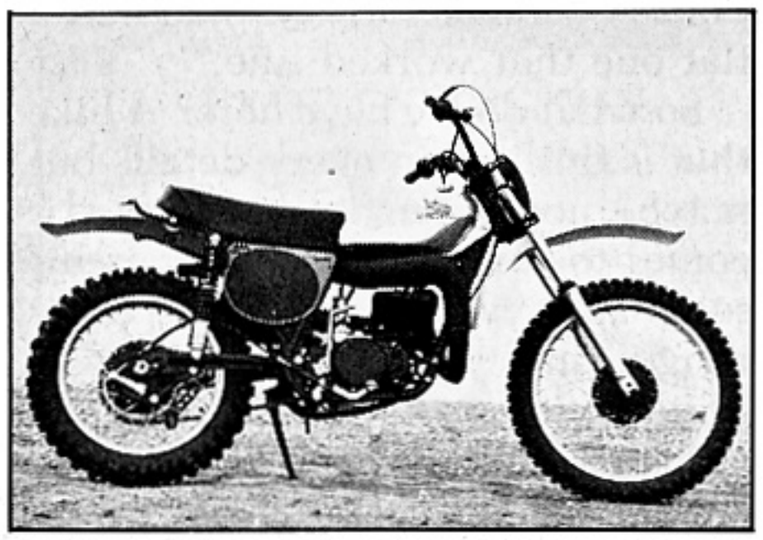


Dave Haugh forgot to gray-tape his leathers for photos.

Both the forks and the shocks seem a step backward from the '73 unit relative to the competition. On the straight-ahead stuff the bike is stable but the rear end feels deficient on up damping. Spring rate seems OK. Take a modified forward mounted '73 with Konis across the whoops. Then try the '75 across the same stretch and feel the seat come up and whap you in the rear. On smoother tracks the suspension is sufficient.

Dave Haugh, local hotshoe, and Al Baker, Baja basher, rode it. Their expert-type comments. I could square it or hit the berm. The front wanted to wash out a little bit, I thinks it's more the forks than the geometry. It's got good power. It comes on low and doesn't level off like it did last year. I tried getting in trouble deliberately but there was always power there to get me out. Didn't have to sit on the tank to corner. It turns better, the harsh suspension is the limiting factor. Set up the suspension to personal taste and it's definitely competitive.

You don't hardly need a seat of the pants to notice how the power's been changed. We got a peak horsepower reading of 26.9 on the dyno. 1973 Elsinores got 28 or 29 horses when they were the fastest 250s around. But look at the power readings across the spread. The torque readings from 6000 rpm to sign-off give a really flat curve. Y'all remember how the old 250 came on with its mid-range rocket act, shooting up from 12 horses at 4500 rpm to 26 at six grand? Then it leveled off, making maybe another horse till it redlined at 7500? The torque curve actually peaked at 6000 rpm. The new torque curve is much smoother. Hit the throttle on our famous no-traction adobe cement and you may get a little sideways but you're not worrying about sliding off the track like with the old CR. Throttle control doesn't have to be as precise out of a corner as it was with the '73 Mid Range Rocket. Gunnar thinks it could use a flywheel weight for the rotor or even the MT flywheel to give it that European power to the ground hook-it that makes for easy riding.



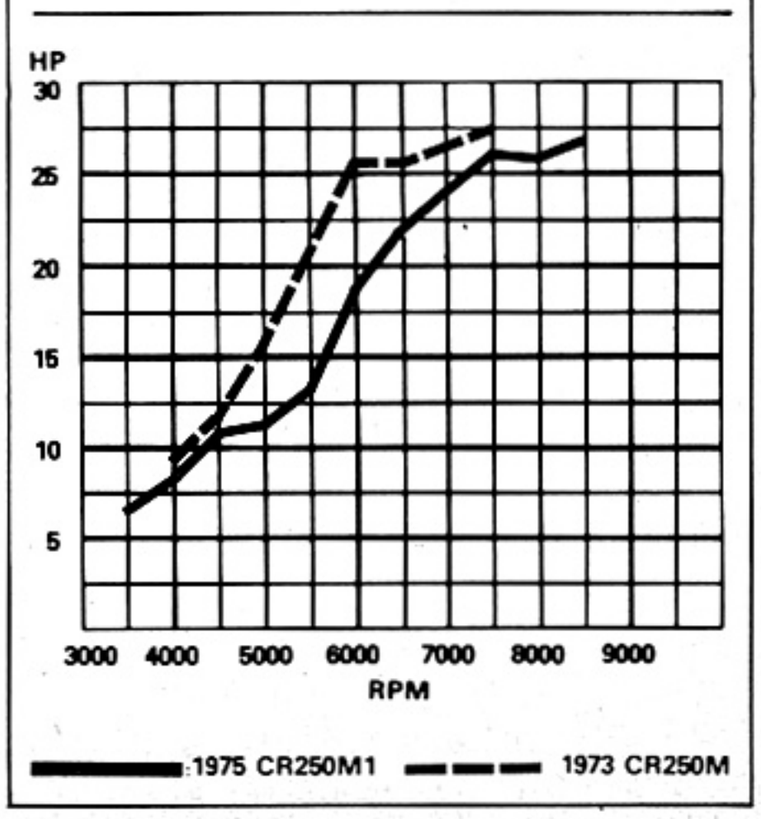
The wider power range means less shifting. Short-shift it before the really gnarly stuff and it'll pull.

Seating position is good. The saddle is higher because of the forward mounted shocks, and the pegs are low. Short-leggers may have to tippy-toe. It's about as narrow between the legs as a bike can be.

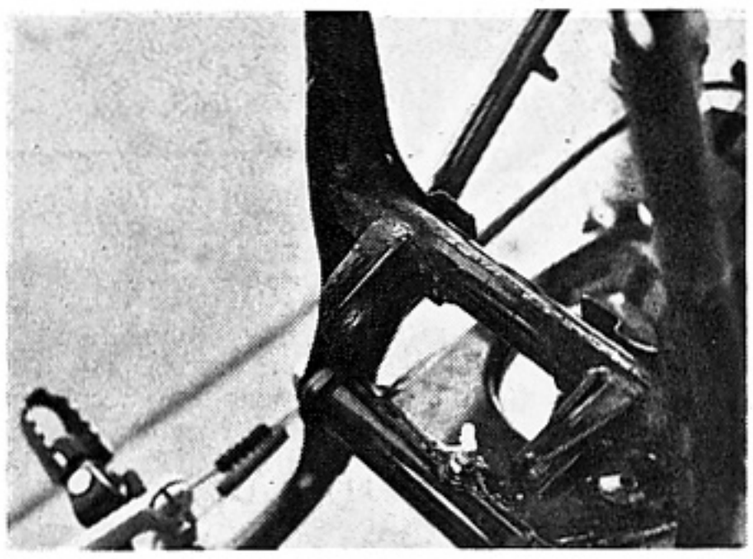
Continued on page 86

HONDA CR250MI ELSINORE

PRICE: Not available at press time
ENGINE TYPE: Two-stroke, single-cylinder, piston port
DISPLACEMENT: 248cc
BORE & STROKE: 70.0mm x 64.4mm
COMPRESSION RATIO: 7.2:1
CARBURETION: 34mm Keihin
HP at RPM: 26.9 at 8500
at the rear wheel
CLUTCH: Wet, multi-plate
PRIMARY DRIVE: 3.30:1
TRANSMISSION RATIOS:
1) 2.06:1
2) 1.57:1
3) 1.25:1
4) 1.04:1
5) 0.86:1
FINAL DRIVE: 3.36 ratio, 520 chain
14-tooth countershaft
47-tooth rear sprocket
AIR FILTRATION: Oiled foam
ELECTRICAL SYSTEM: Points, rotor
LUBRICATION: Pre-mix (Full Bore 32:1)
RECOMMENDED FUEL: Premium
RECOMMENDED OIL: None
FUEL CAPACITY: 6.8 liters (1.8 gallons)
FRAME: Chrome moly
SUSPENSION:
18.0cm travel (7.1 inches)
16.0cm travel (6.3 inches); measured at the rear axle
WHEELS & SPOKES: D.I.D. alloy, shoulderless
TIRES:
3.00x21 Bridgestone knobby
4.00x18 Bridgestone knobby
DIMENSIONS:
Wheelbase . . . . 141.0cm (55.5 inches)
Clearance . . . . . 24.4cm (9.6 inches)
Seat Height . . . . . 86.1cm (33.9 inches)
Handlebar Width . 83.8cm (33.0 inches)
Weight. . . . . 101.6kg (224 pounds); weighed with oil and one gallon of gas
44.3% on front wheel
55.7% on rear wheel
BRAKES:
Cable-operated, front
Cable-operated, rear
INSTRUMENTS: None
LIGHTS: None
SILENCER: Yes, not very quiet
SPARK ARRESTOR: Accessory bolt-on spark arrestor/silencer, approved
PRIMARY KICK: Yes
WARRANTY: None
PARTS PRICES:
Not available at press time

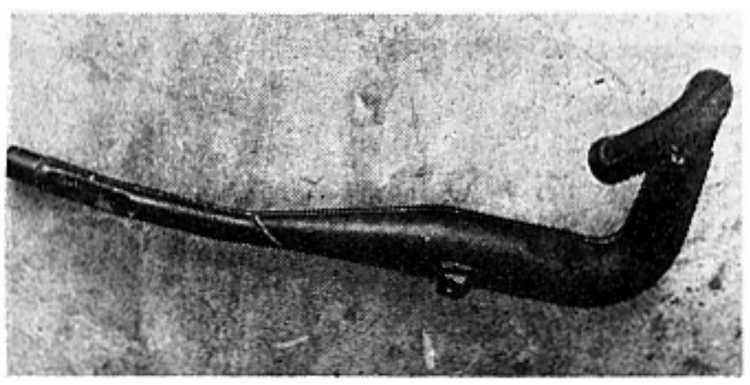


What broke during testing? The rear pipe bracket snapped at the frame crossmember. The steel is very thin and it would probably be a good idea to beef the brackets up before they break. A rear motor mount cracked. Small crack in the rear fender at the mount. The transmission drain plug bailed out, luckily just as our rider was completing his last lap. He pulled into the pits just as the last three drops of transmission oil dripped to the ground. We put in a new drain plug, added oil and the tranny worked fine.



And now a word about good ol' Honda four-stroke . . . ah, two-stroke dependability. One staffer has lived with a CR250 for the past two years. It's been cowtrailed, motocrossed, enduroed and Two Day'd. It's been cut, welded, forward mounted, ported, fork kitted, MT'd and otherwise modified. Significant problems after two years of typical meticulous put gas and oil in it and go riding care. Once, after a crash, it took two kicks to start and five seconds to clean out after being upside down. And a couple of times the plug was wet fouled when the gas was left on overnight. One of the twin bottom frame tubes broke near the down-tube juncture. That's been it. Cow-trailer reliability.

Our test bike was still strong at the end of the testing. It was always running and there was always somebody waiting to climb on, even the guys who said they weren't that crazy about it.



BITS & PIECES

Doherty-type handgrips.

Good rubber accordion-type lever covers, not so easy to button up.

Teensy tiny gas cap opening. It's vented.

D.I.D. shoulderless alloy rims, one rimlock up front, two out back.

Footpegs are serrated, spring loaded and folding.

Foot levers are aluminum. We suggest the old drill-some-holes-in-the - shift - lever - to - protect - the - shaft routine.

Gas tank is alloy, holds 1.8 gallons.

Ignition is still points, unlike the CR125. Can't figure out why.

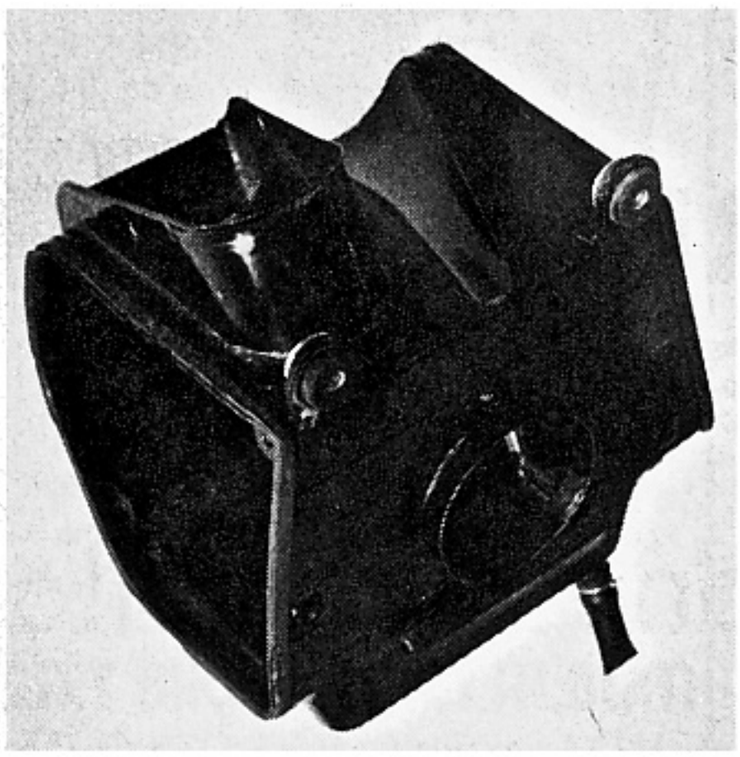
Rubber. Bridgestone four-ply nylon. 3.00x21 and 4.00x18. The 4.00 rear measures out to about 4½ inches. Irregular, erratic knob pattern.

Good hard-surfaced paint on the frame. Al Baker told us it costs twice as much to have it sandblasted off for the red paint treatment.

Depending on riding style, some may occasionally fry their right leg near the front of the up-pipe. This wasn't a common complaint.

SUMMATION

There are two, sort of. If you're into spending some bucks on suspension you're looking at a bike some of us thought was really neat. But not everyone. It's that kind of bike. Love



it or leave it. Or at least like it a lot if you're not the overly emotional sort.

Summation number two. The totally stock bike. An improvement over 1973's mind-boggler. It doesn't have as much peak horsepower but it turns better, the power is wider and not so radical, and it's easier to ride. Twenty-seven horses is still in the ballpark. Consider other peak pump readings. Pursang: 28.9, Husky: 28.0, Ossa: 27.4, Montesa: 28.0. The CR is right in there.

The power alterations reflect a change in Honda's thinking. Instead of going for the 30-hp club they shifted course and went for less radical, wider power. Instead of a breathtaking two grand burst up to six grand and then shift there's a wider, less wild, run up to 8500 rpm.

The ol' Ready to Race Right Out of the Crate Special, the first of its breed, now needs some fettling. Unless you run smooth tracks you have to fix the suspension. And, of course, the pipe and hole guys will be probing for ponies.

What's on the showroom floor is not *thee* 250. Dial in the suspension, mainly the shocks, and for some of you it probably will be *thee* 250. For others it may be just another 250 in a market of near race-ready 250s. It's all happened in the last two years since somebody came out with a mind-tweaker that made everybody get a whole lot better.