



BIG FOUR FIRST

***No Turn Signals,
No Trials Tires,
A Real Trail Bike!***

HONDA MR175 ELSINORE

by the Staff of TRAIL BIKE

Because of one flaw in its character Honda's new MR175 must be credited with the initiation of a new off-road category. The serious foofer. Or the not quite totally serious competitor. A major breakthrough or a bit of a disappointment?

Let's elaborate. And perhaps convince ourselves that Rex Reed isn't where or what he is today because he wouldn't say spit if he was sitting in it.

Hark back to September of 1974. Las Vegas. Loath and fearing country. Eight hours of not quite seeing the Mint 400. There it was. While the road types drooled over the 1000cc Gold Wing tourer more discriminating observers gathered about a surprising new model. Large green tank. No humongously outstretched turn signals. Little labels disclaiming legal street operations. Ah-ha. Could this be a serious enduro competition machine? Small functional lights to meet enduro requirements. And the weight. A shade over 200 pounds. Why, it looks like a CR125 with a big tank and lights. Why, it's the first off-road-only enduro bike from the Big Four. Is it gonna be as good as it looks? Huh? Huh? Huh?

Our thoughts. It looks boss. Ought to really go. If they don't blow it on the power and the power range it ought to be a real gone scoot. Chet and Len were literally drooling.

Fade forward six months. Depending on your needs they either did or didn't blow it with the power. Family enduros? A boss little bike. Light, maneuverable, fairly decent suspension, poke along, pull hills in first and second gear, no sweat.



ISDT Qualifiers? Probably best to forget it, without a hop-up. Down on power. Top two gears too far apart. Definitely not the machine for making up lost time to the next control.

District enduros. Contradiction. Perhaps it's more than it seems to be or perhaps we're just spoiled from riding fast Two Day bikes. Ride a national enduro. We rode the Red Garter. Some said the enduro was timed too slowly. A Class B rider was able to stay on schedule with the MR175. The low-down gearing for first and second let the green tanker scurry, or sometimes plod, up the hills. Pulled them all, sometimes it just wasn't in a hurry about it. Turned nice, seated or up on the pegs. Lightweight. Flick it around. Suspension seems to be soaking it up OK. Nothing to really bitch about here on the trails. Down the mountain. Nice brakes, strong, good feel, friendly little critters. And into the wash. Boogin' time. Uh oh. Just doesn't seem to want to really haul in fourth. Let's see. Down to third. Wind it out. Scream it. Now tap it up to fourth. Nope, just can't get it to scream in fourth. Maybe it was built for 140-pounders.

Gas stop. Time to switch bikes. Get to ride the Penton now. Here Doug, try the MR on for size. Now we have a pretty good Expert class observed trials rider aboard. This is the first enduro he ever rode, used to MX before switching to plonking, so naturally we start him off with a national.

Post competition debriefing. Hey, man, that's a really neat bike. It's down on power but I liked it better than the Penton in the slow stuff. I just stayed up on the pegs and used the throttle to square off the turns between the trees. It scooted right around, turns really good. Down in those gullies I could pick my way through the rocks. I passed so many guys I couldn't believe it. Don't those enduro riders ever stand up? The suspension was better over the slow stutter bumps, didn't beat my hands to death. Give it some beans and it'd really be good. Had trouble keeping it really movin' in fourth. And forget fifth unless you're on level ground.

Before heading to the enduro we put some break-in mileage in at the Dunes. Naturally post break-in mileage consisted of runs across the sand whoops. Same problem. Hard



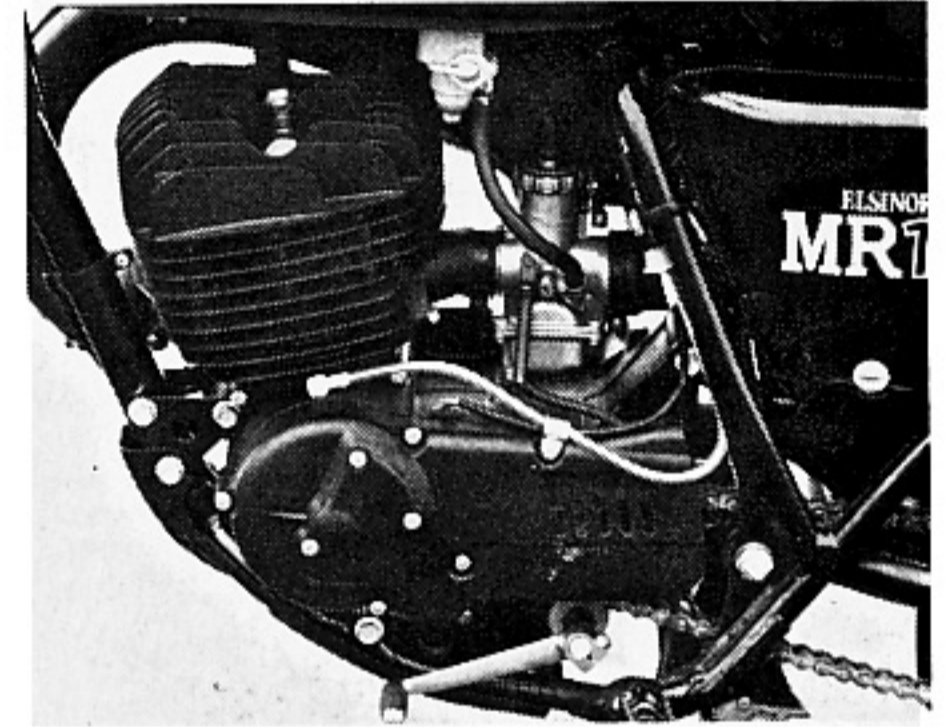
Landlocked windsurfer foofing along.



Your basic wheelie, a cinch in second, an impossibility in fourth.

to get it up on the pipe in fourth. Result: The rear end bouncing sideways because it wasn't getting enough power to drive it straight ahead. Stable enough in third though when it was on the pipe. Gunnar rode it around the hills and came back saying nice little bike.

Let's talk about the power. It isn't a high-horsepower wide-range puller. The low first and second transmission ratios seem more responsible for its hillclimbing propensities or even abilities than a gutsy engine. But those two low gears means there's a good wide spread across the top three. Take a look at the transmission ratios. Here, we'll show you: 3.00, 1.88, 1.30, 0.96, 0.74. Final drive ratio is a fairly high 2.87 from a 15/43 combination of teeth. If you keep the throttle on it'll really buzz in the



Somewhere between MT and CR, MR engine needs less T and more R.



Good-lookin' bike.

HONDA MR175 ELSINORE

PRICE: (retail, approx.) \$897

ENGINE TYPE: Two-stroke,
single-cylinder, piston port

DISPLACEMENT: 171cc

BORE & STROKE: 66mm x 50mm

COMPRESSION RATIO: 6.8:1

CARBURETION: 28mm Keihin

HP at RPM: No figure claimed

CLUTCH: Wet, multi-plate

PRIMARY DRIVE: 4.00:1

TRANSMISSION RATIOS:

1) 3.00:1

2) 1.88:1

3) 1.30:1

4) .096:1

5) 0.74:1

FINAL DRIVE: 2.87 ratio, 428 chain

15-tooth countershaft

43-tooth rear sprocket

AIR FILTRATION: Oiled foam

ELECTRICAL SYSTEM:

Flywheel magneto, points

LUBRICATION: Pre-mix (Full Bore 32:1)

RECOMMENDED FUEL: Premium

RECOMMENDED OIL: None

FUEL CAPACITY: 11.0 liters (2.9 gallons)

FRAME: Mild steel

SUSPENSION:

18.0cm travel (7.1 inches)

10.4cm travel (4.1 inches);

measured at the rear axle

WHEELS & SPOKES:

D.I.D. alloy, shoulderless

TIRES:

3.00x21, Bridgestone knobby

3.50x18, Bridgestone knobby

DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase: 136.4cm (53.7 inches)

Clearance: 24.9cm (9.8 inches)

Seat Height: 82.0cm (32.3 inches)

Handlebar Width: 85.1cm (33.5 inches)

Weight: 97.5kg (215 pounds);

weighed with oil and one gallon of gas

44.9% on front wheel

55.1% on rear wheel

BRAKES:

Cable-operated, front 7.75-square-
inch sweep area

Cable-operated, rear 7.75-square-
inch sweep area

INSTRUMENTS: Speedometer/
odometer

LIGHTS: Yes

SILENCER: Yes

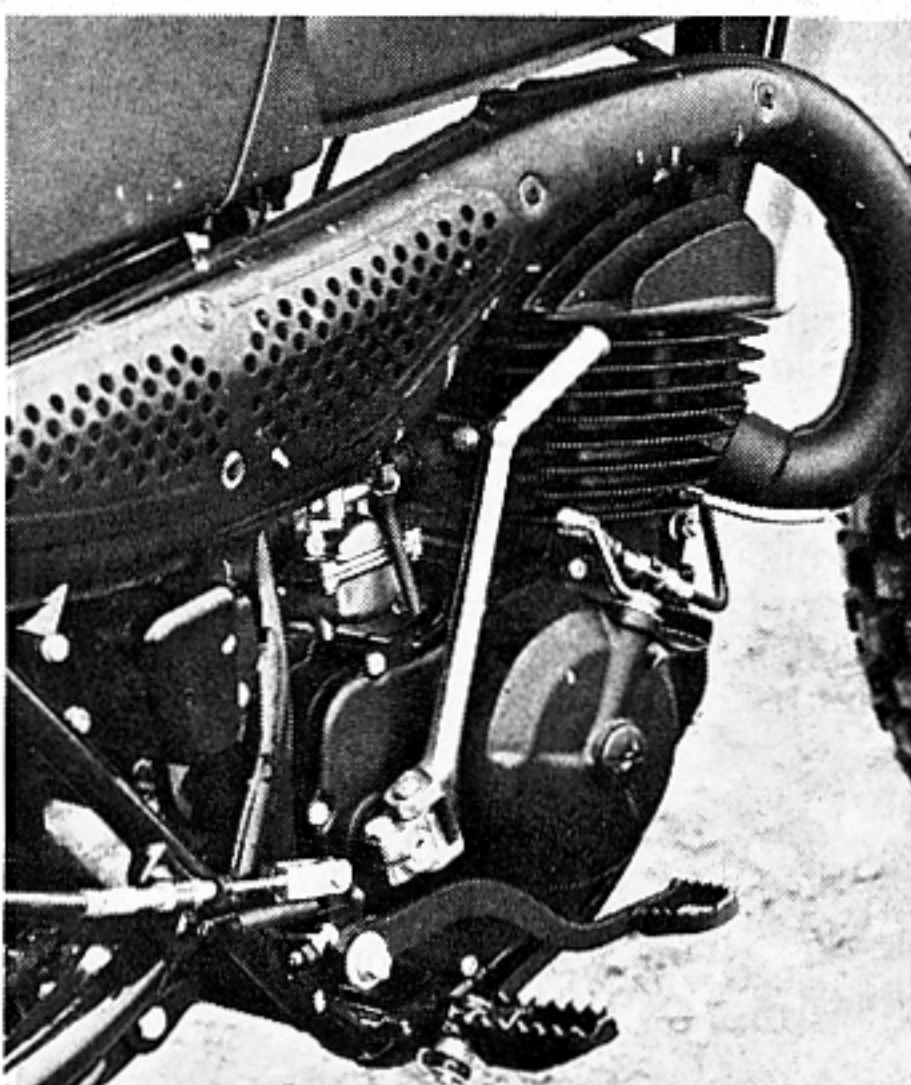
SPARK ARRESTOR: Yes, approved

PRIMARY KICK: Yes

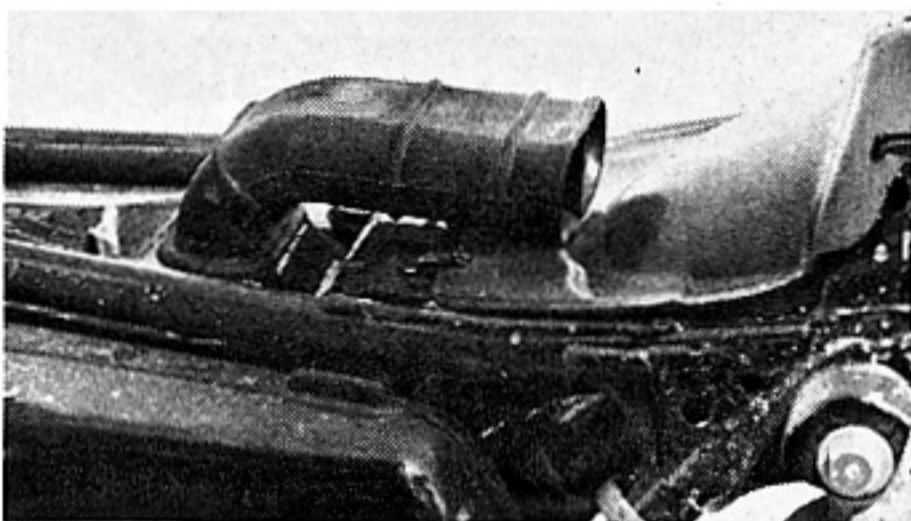
WARRANTY: 90 days

PARTS PRICES:

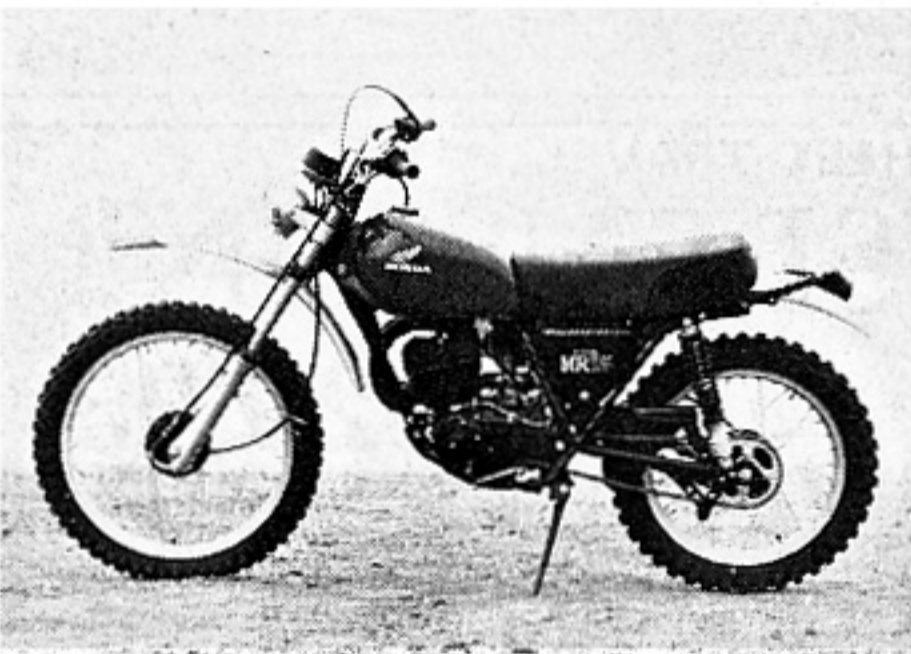
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Jonathan Livingston Seagull strikes again.



We all live in a yellow submarine. It's a clean machine.



About the pipe. It's quiet. The old-fashioned tucked - in - along - the - side up-pipe, rather than the newer high zoot crossover pipe like on the Yamahas and the new CR250. It's tucked in adequately unless you're really critical about width. What's kind of confusing is the cover on the left side. It bulges out for no apparent reason, unless it's to balance the pipe on the right. Pop off the cover and there's nothing underneath.

How about the enduro equipment on the bike? Gas tank holds 2.9 gallons. The taillight is totally unobnoxious, unlike the normal federally inspired and demanded illuminators on the street-legals. It would have to be recessed into the fender to make it any more unobtrusive. Smallish headlight up front. Enough to make you enduro-

legal. Rock guard protection is provided but it will let small boulders through. Speedo with tenths resettable odometer. There's a tool kit compartment under the pipe and plenty of room behind the saddle for an accessory leather tool kit. We used Malcolm Smith's for the Red Garter. Planning on a lot of bashing? We suggest an accessory bash plate. Ground clearance is a good 9.8 inches because of the up-pipe but a sturdy plate would help for hard sloggin! Preston Plastic's should bolt on and Fun'N'Fast will have a steel one.

Clutch was typical Honda. Slip it unmercifully and it doesn't protest.

The air box is a neat bit of work. Two bolts, lift off the seat and behold — the snorkel, peering out of a completely enclosed steel air box. The rear breathing snorkel is out of the way of any water splashed up under the seat up front and well protected from any rear wheel flingings. The oiled foam filter stays remarkably clean, even in the wet muddy stuff. In fact, except for a small grunge area at the snorkel opening the filter surface was still clean at the end of testing.

The frame is made of mild steel but dry weight is just 204 pounds. That's only 23 pounds heavier than the 125 feather racer. That's nice when you have to heft it around in the muck and mire.

We almost blew it. Know how everybody always complains about us testing trailbikes on the track? Well, testing was almost over and we hadn't ridden it on the track yet. We turned Zeal loose and preserved the streak at 147 consecutive tests. (We even rode the DT400 on the track.) Zeal zealously commented. Man, you can really slide that thing. It's really neat. Corners like a billiard ball. I really dug it.

Suspension was OK, adequate for a smooth track. Only negatives were lack of power and need for closer ratios in the taller gears. Almost everybody who got on it came back saying it's a nice little bike.

BITS & PIECES

Usual Honda handlebar attachments. Doherty-type grips, accordion rubber lever covers.

Kill switch is mounted on right side.

Rims. D.I.D. alloy. Shoulderless. One lock up front, two on the rear.

Rubber. Bridgestone Motocross

three lower gears. Same on the hills. Just jam the throttle to the stop in second and hang on.

The MR175 could use a six-speed tranny to close up the spread between the top three gears. As it comes it's more like close, close, medium, too wide, way too wide. The alternative is gearing down by dropping a tooth at the countershaft. This might help some, but would make first super-low-down, more than is really necessary.

knobbies. Four-ply nylon. 3.00x21 and 3.50x18.

Strong, flexible, plastic fenders.

Pegs are serrated, spring loaded and folding.

Points case cover has little bell window. Lets you get to the points for timing check without having to remove the cover itself.

Head has second hole for another plug or a compression release.

SUMMATION

The MR175 is either the world's greatest foo foo bike, a standard by which all future efforts must be



Swedish polka, cha cha cha.

judged (bring on the trumpets, key of C, fellows), or it is a potentially serious enduro bike flawed by an absence of power.

If you're into foofooery you'll probably love it just the way it is. Because it's so much better than what you're riding now. Quiet, mild-mannered, slow-speed hill-chugger, second-gear wheelie-popper. It looks good, should prove dependable, it has an air filter that will probably need servicing every other leap year. Look at it this way. You don't have to pull off the turn signals and the lights or put on the knobbies. You already have 'em and at \$897 the price seems right to us.

If you buy the bike for Two Day type riding you'll need to make some changes. Foremost is power. Maybe it's the Casper Milquetoast pipe. Maybe a larger carb, or both, or a little porting. The bike needs help to make serious power to pull the taller gears. Maybe not so easy to slip a six-speed box in there, though. Add the cost of dialing in the suspension and you just might have something to go play with Pentons, Huskys and Can-Ams. 