



Honda CR125R Elsinore

THE WAITING IS OVER

After two years of rumors, we find out the facts

By the Staff of Dirt Bike

Everybody's been waiting so long for the new 125 Honda to come out, that no matter what the bike was like, it could never live up to all of the rumors circulated. In the last two years, we heard just about everything regarding the soon-to-be-all-conquering baby Elsinore. Thirteen inches of travel, front and rear, said one source. It's going to be a real feather, said another. Buckets of horsepower and an eight-speed gearbox, said yet another inside contact.

Hmmph.

What we ended up with was a more or less conventional 125 racer, with nothing genuinely radical about it. It has some excellent engineering features and a few alarming flaws.

The one flaw that we found almost inexcusable, was the way the bike handled in the corners. Steering accuracy was in never-never land. One of the things that makes most 125s delightful to ride, is the ability to plant the front wheel anywhere you want to, with not much more than a nod of the head required from the rider.

To get the CR125R to go exactly where you want it, takes gymnastic-type movements from the rider and a silent prayer or two to the gods. Part of the problem, we feel, is the use of a 23-inch front wheel. When the bike is leaned over, the largish wheel just sort of flops and falls to the inside. In loose dirt or sand, this behavior is modified and more pronounced.

However, when smacking into berms, the 125 doesn't seem to work all that bad. Sudden directional



changes come easily and the bike feels very light. Taking into consideration that many motocross tracks are nothing more than short straights with walls of death at the end of each straight, the CR will hold its own. On a European-type track, though, where precision in the turns is required, the Honda will prove to be a handful.

The one place where the big front hoop seems to help, is over sharp-edged bumps placed closely together. The kinds of bumps, in fact, that are found entering and exiting most corners. We call them stutter bumps.

Suspension

The action of the forks was decent. Some harshness was felt from the forks, but as they got some time on them, they loosened up considerably

and the action got smoother. After the first riding session, we drained out whatever oil was in and poured in some good five-weight fork oil. This seemed to take that last bit of harshness out completely and we ended up with a satisfactory set of forks. No air caps are on the CR.

We wish the rear end could have been cured as easily. Those longish shocks look like the same sort of hardware found on the bigger Elsinore. And they work the same. In other words, they don't. Not only is the action of the shocks harsh over stutter bumps, but the shocks bottom easily. We suspect the shock design relies on fairly heavy compression damping. The very light springs tend to bear this out. Only when the bike is hitting deep, rolling-type bumps, does the CR125 rear end seem to stroke properly, and then, the bottoming accompanies full travel for even the lightest test riders.

We wouldn't recommend that you waste any time or money trying different springs. Simply replace those shocks at once. This may not be as easy as it sounds, because not many companies make shocks in the 17-inch range. Fox does, but we're talking about a very expensive set of professional shocks and the necessary accompanying hardware. . . gauges and bottles, etc. Works Performance has shocks in the right length, but they're not free either. Which leaves the rider faced with an almost immediate purchase to make. While the CR125 can be raced in stock configuration, the

rear end will pound the rider badly and the chattering action over stutter bumps will cause a serious lack of control and traction.

An all-new motor

Just about nothing is carried over from the older 125s to the new one. It's a compact, extremely light engine (under 40 pounds without the carb), and well thought out. Perhaps the best word that can be used in describing the engine is tiny. It looks almost like a toy.

Honda chose to go with a rather mild motor. The CR125 is a good five horsepower off the frantic RM125. This gets demonstrated rather clearly in a drag race with an RM. We had some starts against a YZ and an RM during a test session. While the CR ran right alongside the YZ, the RM would pull it by three lengths to the first turn. . . every time.

Still, the CR made decent power in the mid-range. Unfortunately, revs build slowly, and if the rider allowed the bike to fall below its most effective working range, it seemed to take a long time to get things working again. On a hard-packed, dry track, the kind of power that the Elsinore produced would make the bike easier to ride than a bike like the RM, but under that condition, the aforementioned handling shortcomings would nullify the smooth power. Truly a paradox.

Knobs, or is that knobettes?

Like the larger Elsinore, the 125 comes with the new Claw Action tires — a Honda exclusive. While these tires are very light and offer excellent straight-line traction, they just don't seem to have good bite under a side load, unless the surface is ideal. The Claw Action tires are designed to flex and grab the ground, but when the stresses generated from hard cornering hit the tires, the sidewalls roll under and a severe wiggle can be felt.

It's too bad the Honda engineers couldn't have figured out a way to get some of that excellent straight-line traction converted to cornering traction. In all fairness, though, the Claw Action tires did give remarkable bite as long as the bike was straight up and down. In fact, we climbed some powdery hills quite easily because of the excellent tractile qualities of the tires.

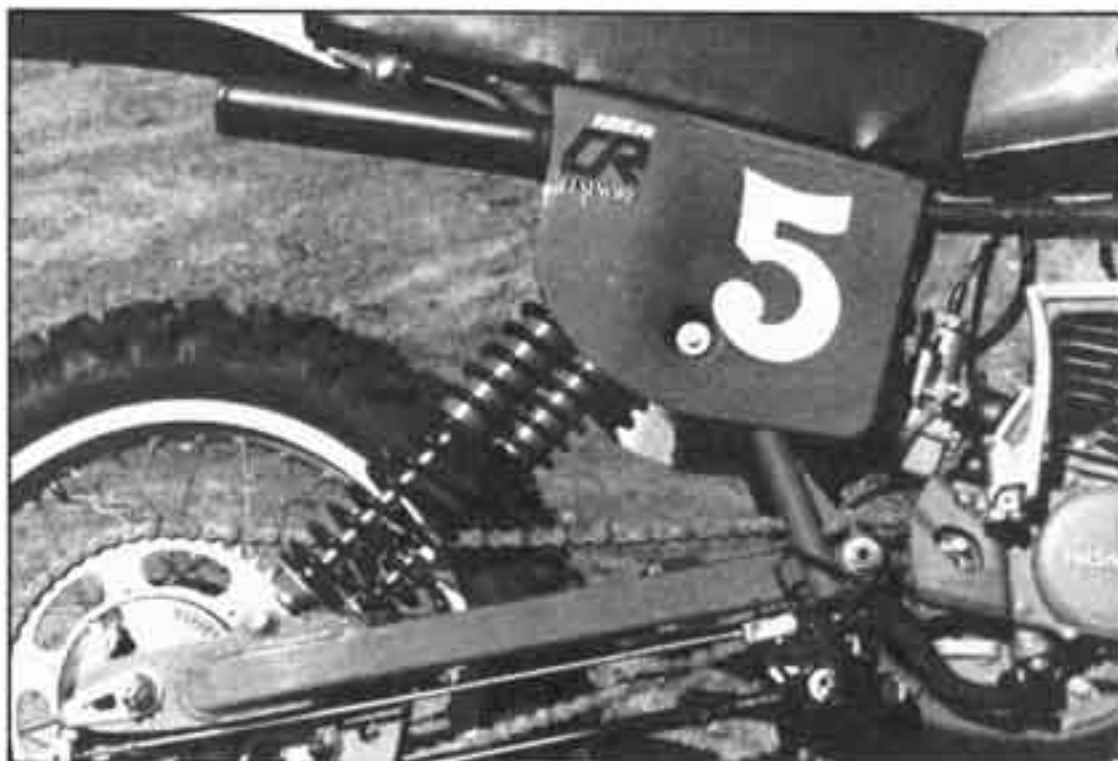
Lowering the tire pressure only worsened the condition on side load skittering. Apparently, the Claw Action tires have to run a fairly high pressure to keep from distorting the sidewalls. We got best results in the 14-15 psi range. Oh yes . . . the tires worked quite well in mud, which



Engine looks almost tiny in the roomy frame. Less carb, actual weight of bright red motor is under 40 pounds. Finning looks on the smallish side.



As per usual Honda practice, the CR125R is loaded with decals warning the rider of just about everything. Bars had an odd feel, being high and angled sharply forward. When riders rotated them back for greater comfort, the ends then sloped down like a divining rod.



Claw Action tires are a Honda/Bridgestone joint effort. While straight-line traction is excellent, the tires roll badly under heavy side loads.



Forks had 11 inches of travel and did a decent job on the bumps. New caps on axle are four-bolt pattern and very strong. This should help keep fork flex to a minimum.

A bit of new and old: kickstarter is ultra-light aluminum alloy, while the Honda is the only 1979 MXer on the market with outdated, non-FIM-type side panels. Strange.

Shocks are long and angle sharply forward. Like the suspenders on the 250, they appear to have excessive rebound damping and early sagging springs. Most riders will seek a replacement rear suspension.

Honda CR125R Elsinore

ENGINE TYPE	Single-cylinder, two-stroke, reed valve
BORE AND STROKE	56mm x 50.7mm
DISPLACEMENT	124cc
HORSEPOWER (CLAIMED BY FACTORY):	24 at 9500 rpm
CARBURETION	32mm Keihin
FACTORY RECOMMENDED JETTING:	
Main jet	155
Needle jet	Fixed, not adjustable
Jet needle	Standard
Pilot jet	60
Slide number	2.5
RECOMMENDED GASOLINE	Premium — 92 to 100 octane rating
RECOMMENDED OIL (MFR.)	Honda two-cycle oil
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	6.5 liters (1.72 U.S. gallons)
FUEL TANK MATERIAL	Aluminum
GAS/OIL RATIO	20:1
LUBRICATION	Pre-mix
OIL CAPACITY	N/A
AIR FILTRATION	Oiled foam
CLUTCH TYPE	Wet, multi-plate
TRANSMISSION	Six-speed, constant mesh
GEARBOX RATIOS	
1	2.538:1
2	1.875:1
3	1.556:1
4	1.300:1
5	1.136:1
6	1.000:1
GEARING, FRONT/REAR	13/ 51
IGNITION	CDI
PRIMARY KICK SYSTEM?	Yes
RECOMMENDED SPARK PLUG	NGK B9EV, Champion N-59G
SILENCER/SPARK ARRESTOR/QUALITY:	
.	Silencer only, average
EXHAUST SYSTEM	High-pipe, right side
FRAME, TYPE	Chrome moly, single downtube, split cradle
WHEELBASE	1420mm (55.9 inches)

GROUND CLEARANCE	355mm (14.0 inches)
SEAT HEIGHT AT TANK	935mm (36.8 inches)
STEERING HEAD ANGLE	28 degrees
TRAIL	133mm (5.2 inches)
WEIGHT WITH ONE GALLON GAS	206.8 pounds
RIM MATERIAL	Aluminum
TIRE SIZES	
Front	3.00x23 knobby (Claw Action pattern lugs)
Rear	4.00x18 knobby (Claw Action pattern lugs)
SUSPENSION	
Front, type and travel	Telescopic, forward axle, 11.0 inches
Rear, type and travel	Swingarm, slant shocks, 11.0 inches
INTENDED USE, MFR	Motocross, off-road racing
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Japan
PRICE, APPROX	\$1275
PARTS PRICES, HIGH-WEAR ITEMS	
Piston assembly, complete	\$36.50
Rings only	\$6.70
Cylinder	\$119.25 (Note: This is 1978 price. 1979 price N/A.)
Shift lever	\$9.70
Brake pedal	\$19.10
Front sprocket	\$10.20
DISTRIBUTOR	
American Honda Motor Co., Inc.	
100 West Alondra Blvd.	
Gardena, California	
OVERALL RATING, FROM 0 TO 100, VARIOUS CATEGORIES, KEEPING INTENDED USE OF MACHINE IN MIND:	
Handling	40
Suspension	60
Power	80
Cost	94
Attention to detail	93
Effectiveness, stone stock	71

indicates that they just might make a very good enduro or trail riding tire. We rode on a sloppy track for a short period of time and were quite pleased with how well they hooked up under that condition.

Bits and pieces

Shifting was smooth and easy and far superior to the action of the 250 Elsinore gearbox. The lever itself was on the short side, demanding that it be positioned low. Too low for our tastes. Riders with anything over a size nine foot griped about the length.

Both brakes worked well, with no grabbiness felt at either end. The brake pedal had a protective rod of some sort on it. For what reason, we cannot discern. Almost every rider mentioned that it irritated them and rubbed against their boot. You can saw it off or just bend it in out of the way if you like, though.

The gas tank is high, slim and tiny, holding only 1.7 gallons of pre-mix. As usual, the gas cap is pathetically small and just about nothing fits in to aid filling the gas tank. It's a pain to carry a funnel around with you all the time.

Fenders are gracefully designed and made of flexible plastic, which is as it should be. Side plates are old-style, with a fair bulge in them where they cover the top shock mounts. It doesn't seem to bother you when you ride it,

but sure looks lumpy when viewing from above.

We liked the saddle. It was firm, but well-shaped, and let the rider move around comfortably.

Only one tester liked the bars, and he was on the tall side. Everyone else thought they were too high and had an awkward bend. Grips were small and good and Honda's own design.

The high, right-side-mounted pipe was tucked in nicely and out of harm's way. A narrow, but longish, muffler kept the noise level low for a racing bike.

Lots of use of aluminum is obvious throughout the machine. Even the kickstarter is made of aluminum. The bike looks lighter than it really is, but a trip to the disgustingly accurate DB scales reveals the truth: a fraction over 200 pounds dry.

We felt some flex in the swingarm. No doubt there'll be an aluminum arm for sale before the ink is dry on this paper. That should trim some more weight off the CR. It might also have a different bottom shock mount, letting the rider have a greater choice of accessory shocks.

You'll find a chrome liner on the barrel, so keep the filter fresh and clean or face up to the fact of buying a new barrel if grit gets in. This also helps keep weight down.

Finning is on the small side on both

the barrel and the head. We suspect that under hot weather running, an accessory head will be needed. Especially in sandy areas, which really sap power and bring up engine heat.

Our pegs sagged downward quickly. Now, we realize that the average dirt bike rider stands about 5'8" and weighs in at 220 or so, but 125 riders usually tip the scales at a lesser weight. Even so, the test riders in our first photo session (A.J. Whiting and John Rudder) didn't weigh over 145 and they had the pegs drooping a bit after several hours of riding.

Servicing the air filter was something we avoided like the plague. Nothing is easy to get to, but the total package appears quite waterproof. By comparison, the YZ air cleaner setup is simple.

A CDI provides the spark and it made the CR a rather easy starter. Usually, no more than one or two brisk stabs were needed to get things stirred up and firing.

A six-petal reed (Honda-designed) accepts gas from a 32 millimeter carb. No rejetting was required, even though we rode the bike on one very cold day and several warmish days.

The countershaft sprocket and the swingarm pivot are very close to each other, eliminating the need for any chain tensioners. We still tossed the chain twice, but think that this was caused by swingarm flex, rather than any fault in c/s locations.

Chain is 520, which is plenty for a 125.

The bike is tall for a 125, with the seat height at almost 36 inches. Short riders will have to work hard at getting on the bike.

Overall, the CR125 is a handsome bike, with red paint and plastic everywhere.

A long, hard look at the CR125R

Summing it up, one must conclude that the package is too little, too late. To run with the big boys, much hop-up work will have to be done. The mellow powerband must give way to a more hyper motor, like the RM.

As it stands, a KX or an RM will seriously pull the CR on a decent straight, or uphill. It can run with the new YZ in a drag race, but the new YZ handles better than the CR.

Two years ago, the CR would have been the way to go. They waited too long to bring this bike out and in the interim, the competition spurred into a commanding lead.

Perhaps Honda made the engine tractable and torquey to suit the Novice or Beginner rider. We don't know. We do know that these are the only classes where the 1979 CR125R will be competitive. □