



1980 HONDA 125 ELSINORE CR125R

SURPRISE PACKAGE

The only thing left from 1979 is the paint

By the Editors of Dirt Bike

Last year, DB climbed all over the 125 Elsinore and gave it a "less than favorable review." In our 125 shootout, it came in dead last. Hey... what the H-E-double-hockey-sticks; nobody's perfect.

It's reassuring that Honda listened to the gripes, snivels and complaints of the honest magazines and ignored the hummers of the stroke books. They have literally come out with a totally new machine with none of the faults of last year's Baby Elsinore.

In actual fact, the new CR125R is a stunner!

We are pleased to report that the 1980 bike is an absolute missile. One of our test riders, John Rudder, raced the bike at Saddleback Park as part of the testing. In the first moto, with no time on the bike, he blew the start badly by choosing the wrong gear and wasting all of his time in wheelspin. That start demanded that he thread through a field of crazed 125 Intermediates and work up to a lackluster ninth.

In the second moto, he pulled a strong holeshot up the very long Saddleback uphill start. This start area is often referred to as Horsepower Hill. It's long, fairly steep and hard as a tax collector's heart, with enough ruts and ripples to demand total concentration from the racers.

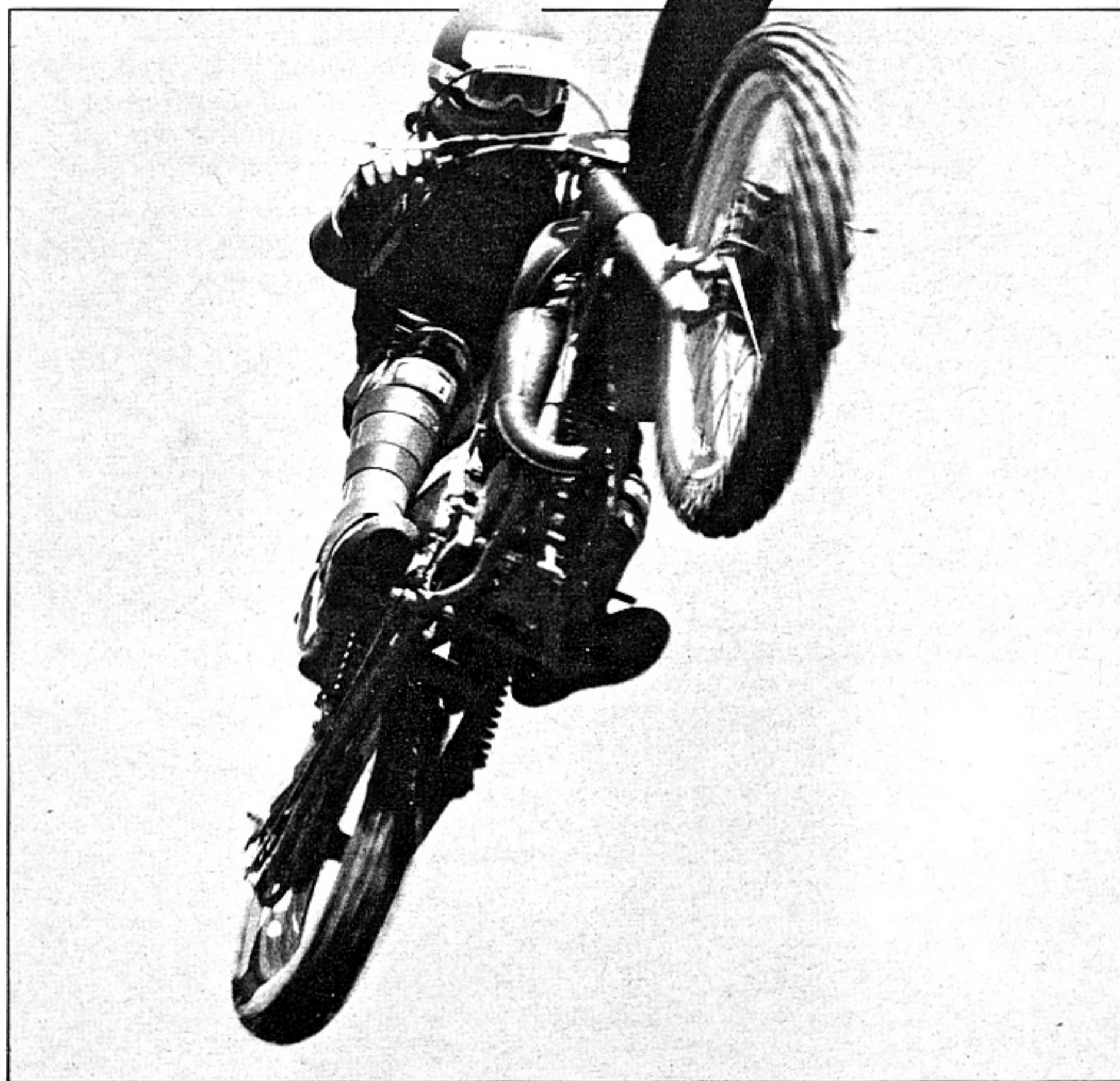
Just how fast is the new CR?

Fast enough to give fits to a handful of 250s in a drag race to the first turn at the Indian Dunes track. Fast enough to pull our 1980 RM125T by a few lengths. Fast enough to make us realize that Honda did all their homework before they released this machine.

If this sounds like a rant and rave session about the new 125, it is. Consider last year's bike once again.

Poor forks. Grim shocks. A flexy-flyer swingarm. A flat spot in carburetion. Not much power. Funny tires, with a 23-inch slab of Claw Action rubber up front. Frame geometry that would make a shopping cart look stable at high speeds.

Now, take a quick glance at the new iron: Forks seem to work just fine. Shocks ain't bad at all. Swingarm looks like it was part of a bridge at one time.



Spot-on carburetion. Plenty of beans. Conventional tires, front and rear. Improved handling and turning habits.

Well, well, well. Now you see why the rave session is not only in order, but deserved.

With the emergence of the CR125R as a very correct product, we also see a new attitude from Honda. They really seem to be trying and are soliciting input from several sources. In fact, at the recent Reno press show where all the new models were shown to the public, Honda made the rather bizarre announcement that Showa had made a commitment to get rid of their reputation for mediocre suspension components once and for all. Showa, as you might know, is a manufacturer of forks and shocks that is largely owned by Honda. Hence, the common usage of Showa goodies on all Hondas, dirt and street.

Check out those big, fine legs...

Obviously, the commitment to improved suspension was taken very seriously with the new 125. Most riders who put some time in on the test bike felt that the forks were at least equal to anything put out by KYB. KYB, as you might again know, sells a huge amount of forks and shocks to Suzuki, Yamaha and Kawasaki. What we have here is a genuine competition between two suspension giants that can only benefit the rider.

Those new forks are air-assisted and feature the now-standard leading axle setup. A pair of composite-material low-friction bearings let the stanchions work in the sliders in a smooth, yet strong fashion. Travel is the same as last year's bike at 11.8 inches, but the action is vastly improved.

You won't find any more harsh jolts when landing from a jump, or nailing a

square-edged ridge. Rebound damping appears to be spot-on, also. We'd have to rate the new Showa/Honda forks at least as highly as a set of dialed-in Suzuki forks.

The air fitting is slanted at a sharp angle, making it possible to check or adjust air pressure without taking the bars off. Only one thing seems out of place on this smooth-working front end; it appears that the slim fork boots will not allow full travel of the sliders without getting in a state of boot bind.

At the rear, a decent set of shocks is perched between the odd-shaped swingarm and the main upper frame section. While not perfect, these new shocks have a smooth, decent action that shouldn't draw many complaints.

It does appear, however, that the springs are not long-lasting. We had to constantly bump up the preload in the first few hours of riding, then ran out of usable preload. A good accessory spring would solve the problem. Something like a pre-stroked S&W. It shouldn't be necessary for the average rider/racer to run scurrying off for a set of accessory shocks, as with all previous Honda MXers. And, some of the lighter riders just might find that the standard shock springs are OK. Heavier—or more aggressive—riders will definitely want a stouter spring.

Rebound damping is adjustable. We never even bothered checking the rebound damping setting on our test bike, as we experienced no fade, or

packing down. All things considered, the Showa shocks that come stock on the CR are very decent units.

Horse of a different color

Even though the engine looks a great deal like the powerplant of last year, all similarity ends with the paint job. There are ponies lurking in that bright red barrel that were never there before.

The exhaust port now exits dead center out of the smallish barrel. It can do this without a hassle, because the frame is now a double-downtube fixture, rather than last year's flexy single-downtube frame. We at DB have always preferred double-downtube frames for their inherent qualities over a single-tube setup. They're only slightly heavier, but more than make up for the weight increase with strength.

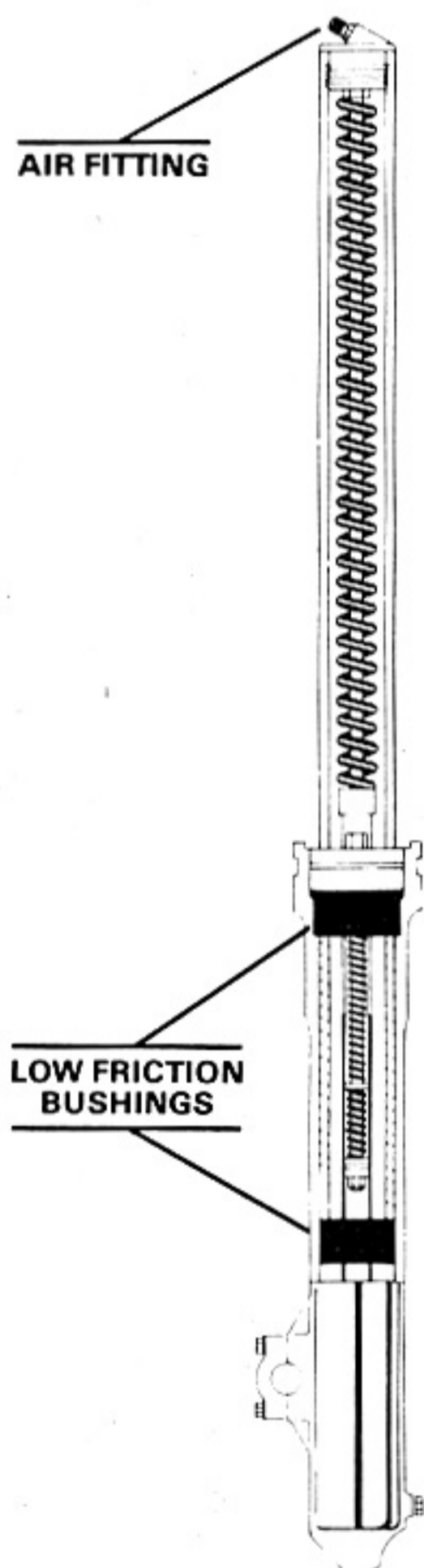
Fin area has been increased on the cylinder head. The smallish head on last year's bike let the engine run dangerously hot on occasion. Honda also keeps working on their reed, making it more responsive to slight pressure drops with each model change. They've achieved almost the same efficiency as a Boyesen-type reed. If you'll recall, the first Elsie's in 1978 came with a Boyesen-type reed and the legal department of Honda ran into some problems with patent rights. Their grid pattern reed is very thin and seems to be extremely responsive. Still, if you want a real thrill, install a Boyesen reed in your Honda and experience it.

Starting the new powerplant proved surprisingly easy. Rarely was more than one kick called for. We found that the carburetion was absolutely nuts-on and no flat spots or blubbering were experienced anywhere in the rpm range. The CR runs a 34mm carb, which is large for a 125, but pulls as cleanly as could be asked for.

The engine pulls cleanly, but not strongly right off the bottom. If you find yourself in too tall a gear, a fan on the clutch is all that's needed to get the revs singing again. At a fairly low point in the early mid-range, the CR engine takes a deep breath and starts pulling like a 250. The rush here is positively inspiring. Not only that, after that jolt at mid-range, the revs run out hard and clean and the bike will not fall on its face if forced to over-rev.

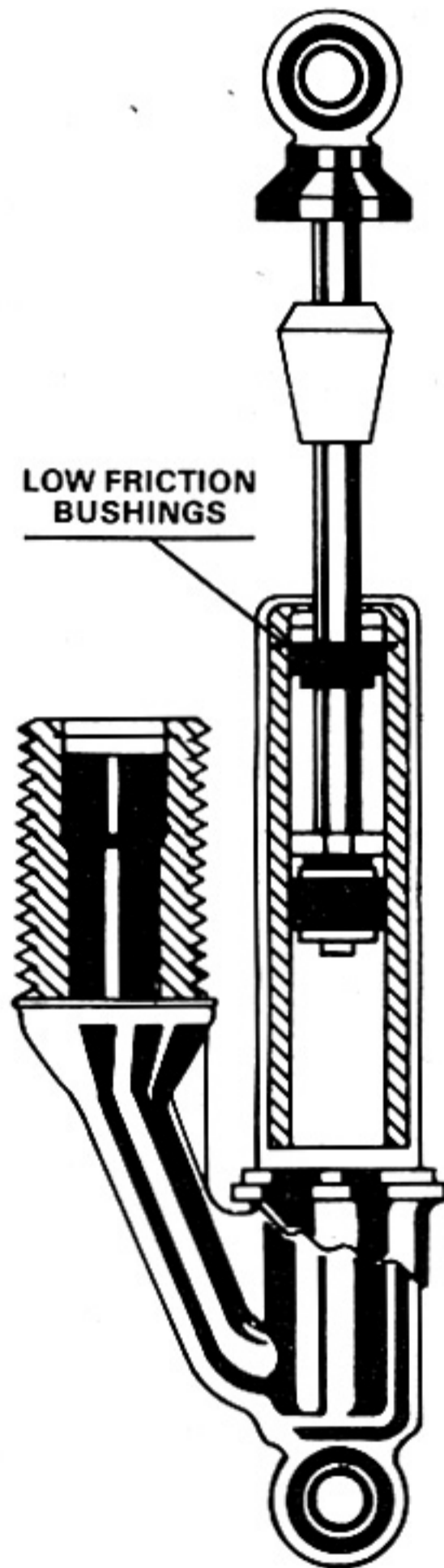
From corner to corner, the Honda appears to be the bike to beat this year. Even though the CR pulls hard, there's very little tail-wagging and lost forward motion in wheelspin. The bike tracks straight and true under power and the rider only has to pay attention to keeping the front end on the ground. To answer your question before you ask it, yes, the CR125R is faster than the

NEW AIR ASSISTED, LEADING AXLE FORKS



The 1980 CR250R and CR125Rs utilize new air assisted leading axle front forks which are adjustable by varying air pressure. The air pressure works in conjunction with the steel springs to adjust front suspension preload. By increasing or decreasing air pressure, the forks can be tuned in to various track conditions. Dual, low friction synthetic bushings are incorporated to minimize stiction and provide smooth action through 11.8 inches of travel.

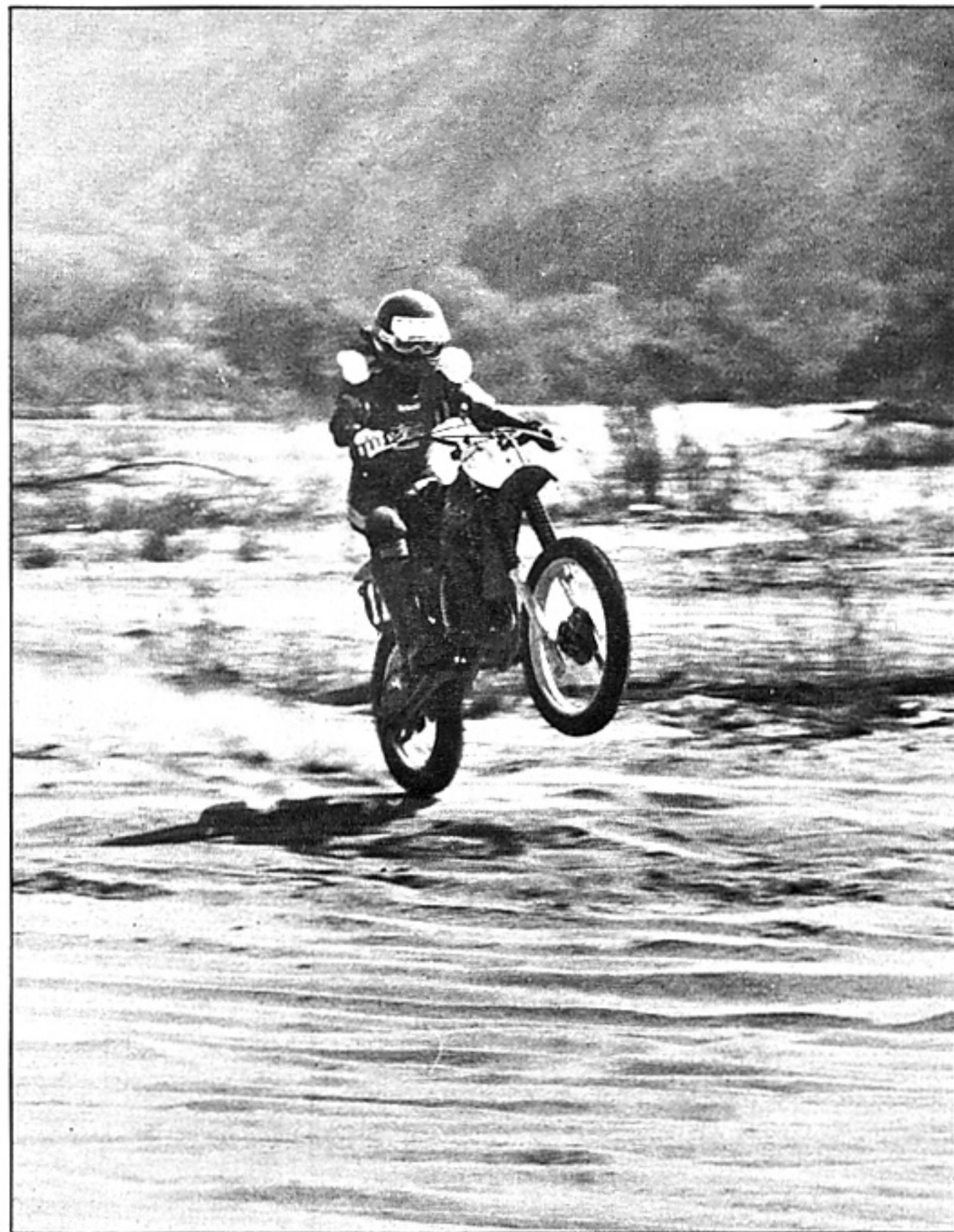
NEW ADJUSTABLE DAMPING RESERVOIR SHOCKS



These exclusive gas-charged shock absorbers have finned aluminum reservoir bodies for increased fluid capacity and improved heat dissipation. Two rebound damping adjustment settings are provided which combine with five spring preload settings to allow the rider to fine-tune the rear suspension. In addition, these advanced shocks incorporate urethane bumpers, bushed mounting eyes and low friction synthetic bushings for smooth action.



Last year's grim Claw-Action tires have been replaced with decent knobbies front and rear.



Honda's CR125R had a very light front end, which glided through sand and whoops effortlessly.



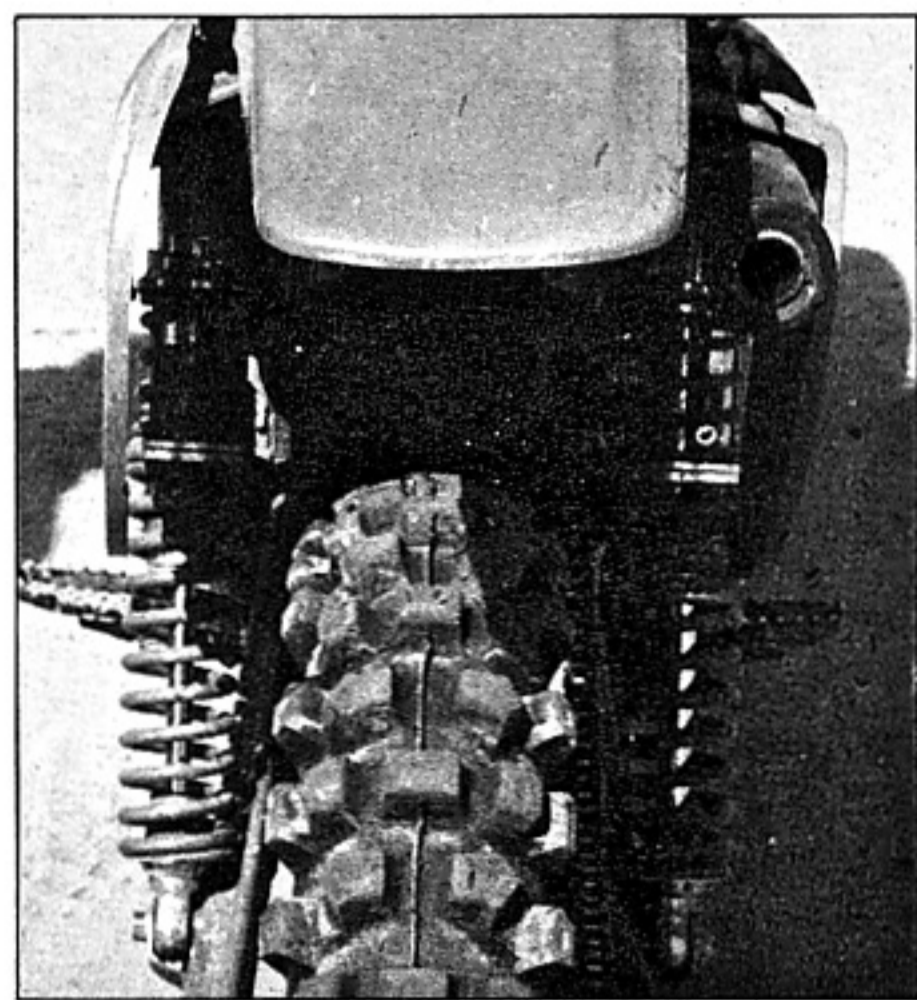
The factory went out to the works bikes and took off a center-port cylinder for this year's 125, along with more fin area.



Gas tank material is now plastic for better durability, and a new expansion chamber has been welded into the pipe to suit the center-port cylinder.



A banana-type swingarm went on the '80 Elsinore, to keep the seat height down after the addition of new Showa reservoir shocks.



RM125T that we tested last month. Like the man says, "You snooze, you lose."

Handles

Last year, we moaned long and hard about two vicious handling traits of the Elsinore: The front end pushed and plowed in anything less than an ideal traction situation, and, when decelerating in stutter-bumps, the bike shook its head badly. Tank-slapper city.

No such problems were encountered on the '80 model. Truly amazing, the difference between the two bikes. Rather than relying on hunting berms, this new 125 could go for the inside line with a certain measure of confidence. The rear end would break loose before the front, which is as it should be. While not a natural slider, the CR125R could tolerate a twitch of the rear end to the outside of the track without disaster rearing its ugly head.

To place the new Elsinore in a proper category, we'd have to say that there are no longer any surprises in store and the bike is a neutral handler. If the rider weights the outside peg properly, and puts enough weight on the front end, no washout is found. The new CR reacts well to weight shifts, and making either end bite well takes nothing more than an intelligent shift of weight to the proper peg. In a word, the 1980 CR is an *easy* bike to ride. The rider does not have to work like a dog to overcompensate for built-in handling faults. There are no real faults. We'd have to call the latest Elsinore an honest machine with no vices.

Bits and pieces

The new plastic tank is much the same shape and style of the works units of 1979. And, finally, a large gas cap makes its presence known. About time.

A CDI ignition provides the spark, like last year's bike, but the curve is different.

The swingarm pivot is very close to the countershaft sprocket—only 64mm—making for minimal chain tension variation.

Travel is the same as last year, with 11.8 inches up front and 11.0 at the rear.

The piston now has two rings, for increased life span, better sealing and less piston slap and rocking.

Even the pipe has been changed. Combined with the straighter shot of exhaust gases from the new center port, the pipe also brings in much more snap at the lower revs.

Needle bearings ride on the swingarm pivot. That double-downtube, full-cradle frame is made of genuine chrome moly tubing.

Weight of the bike is about the same as last year's: a fraction under 200 pounds bone-dry.

FIM-style side plates make for a styling improvement this year. If you

don't have those numbers at the rear, the bike just looks old.

A urethane chain roller replaces the aluminum unit of last year. Quieter and longer-lasting.

The sidestand is detachable. Nice touch.

The bottom line

It's good. In fact, better than we would have imagined. As it stands, Honda has just rewritten the book on how a 125 should perform. We're impressed. However, before we make the final, stick-'em-in-the-eye judgment, we're going to wait and see just what the rest of the folks have to offer. We still haven't slung a leg over the KX125 Uni-Trak. Maybe next month for that. And there still remains the cruel impact of time on these machines. Another 125 shootout brewing?

You bet! □

HONDA CR125R

NAME AND MODEL	..... Honda CR125R-1980
ENGINE TYPE	..... Air-cooled, two-stroke, reed valve, single
BORE AND STROKE	..... 55.5mm x 50.7mm
DISPLACEMENT	..... 122cc
CARBURETION	..... 34mm Keihin
RECOMMENDED GASOLINE	..... Premium
RECOMMENDED OIL (MFR.)	..... Hondaline
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	..... 1.7 gallons
FUEL TANK MATERIAL	..... Plastic
GAS/OIL RATIO	..... 20:1
LUBRICATION	..... Pre-mix
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/QUALITY	..... High pipe, average noise
FRAME, TYPE	..... Double cradle
WHEELBASE	..... 55.1 inches
GROUND CLEARANCE	..... 13.4 inches
SEAT HEIGHT AT TANK	..... 37 inches
STEERING HEAD ANGLE	..... 29 degrees
TRAIL	..... 4.5 inches

WEIGHT WITH ONE GALLON GAS	..... 207 pounds
RIM MATERIAL	..... Aluminum alloy
TIRE SIZES:	
FRONT	..... 3.00x21 4PR knobby
REAR	..... 4.00x18 4PR knobby
SUSPENSION:	
FRONT, TYPE AND TRAVEL	..... Telescopic fork/11.8 inches
REAR, TYPE AND TRAVEL	..... Shocks, swingarm/11.0 inches
INTENDED USE, MFR.	..... Off-road competition, motocross
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	..... Japan
PRICE, APPROX.	..... N/A
PARTS PRICES, HIGH WEAR	
ITEMS	..... 1979 prices—1980 prices N/A
PISTON ASSEMBLY, COMPLETE	..... \$36.50
RINGS ONLY	..... \$8.06
CYLINDER	..... N/A
SHIFT LEVER	..... \$9.70
BRAKE PEDAL	..... \$19.10
FRONT SPROCKET	..... \$10.20
DISTRIBUTOR:	
American Honda	
100 W. Alondra Blvd.	
Gardena, California 90247	
OVERALL RATING, FROM 0 TO 100, VARIOUS CATEGORIES, KEEPING INTENDED USE OF MACHINE IN MIND:	
HANDLING	..... 95
SUSPENSION	..... 95
POWER	..... 99
COST	..... N/A
ATTENTION TO DETAIL	..... 98
EFFECTIVENESS, STONE STOCK	..... 98