

RACE TEST



Honda CRF



□ Sometimes a bike takes on a magical, Alice in Wonderland aura before it even appears on the marketplace. First, it is rumored to be almost ready for release. Secondly, the word spreads that it is an exact replica of the works bike. Then everyone is saying that it has 40 horsepower. And finally, when one shows up in the hands of some super-psyched local expert, with the eyes of every eager potential consumer on him, he goes out and wins. He reports that it is the greatest thing for motocross since Deep Heat rub, and the pits go *ga-ga*. Sometimes a magazine helps this sort of craziness along by getting a pre-production prototype and taking off somewhere secretly and testing it. Editors and test riders are not immune to star worship and motorcycle deification. There used to be an automobile ad that said, "Ask the man who owns one." Nobody who just plunked down 1500 oysters is going to tell you his new bike is a squid.

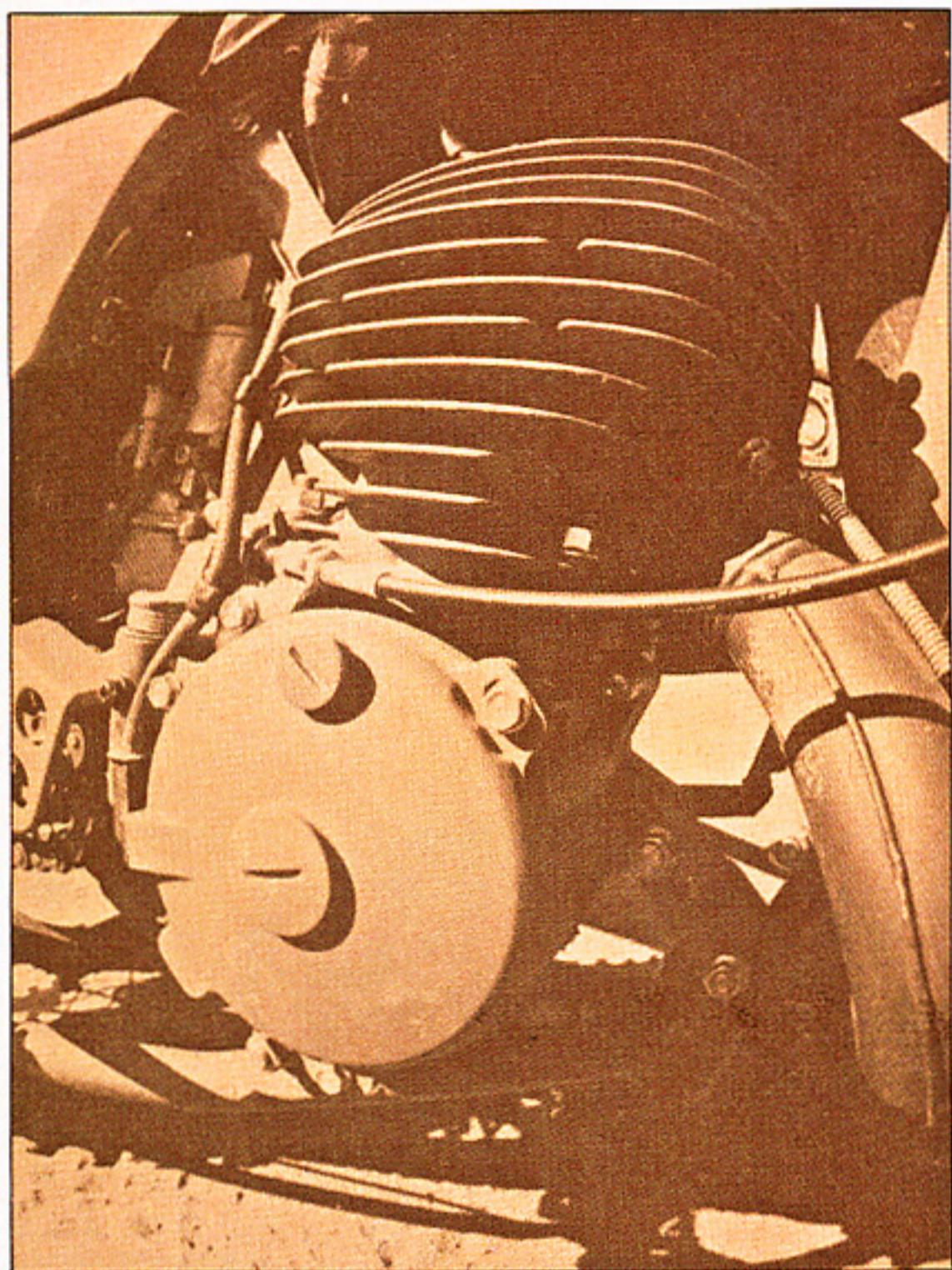
The Honda CR250R is not the lightest 250 motocrosser on the market! It doesn't come close to touching the lightweight Kawasaki KX250A4. The Honda isn't the fastest 250 on the track! The Can-Am 250 MX4 will pull it out in the tully weeds on any straight. The Honda isn't the best-made 250 on the showroom floor! The European brands still win out in the use of quality materials. It isn't the cheapest 250 on the market! It is damn close, though.

So if you take the dreamland ramblings away from the starting gate peanut gallery, what are you left with? The Honda CR250R is the best 250 buy on the

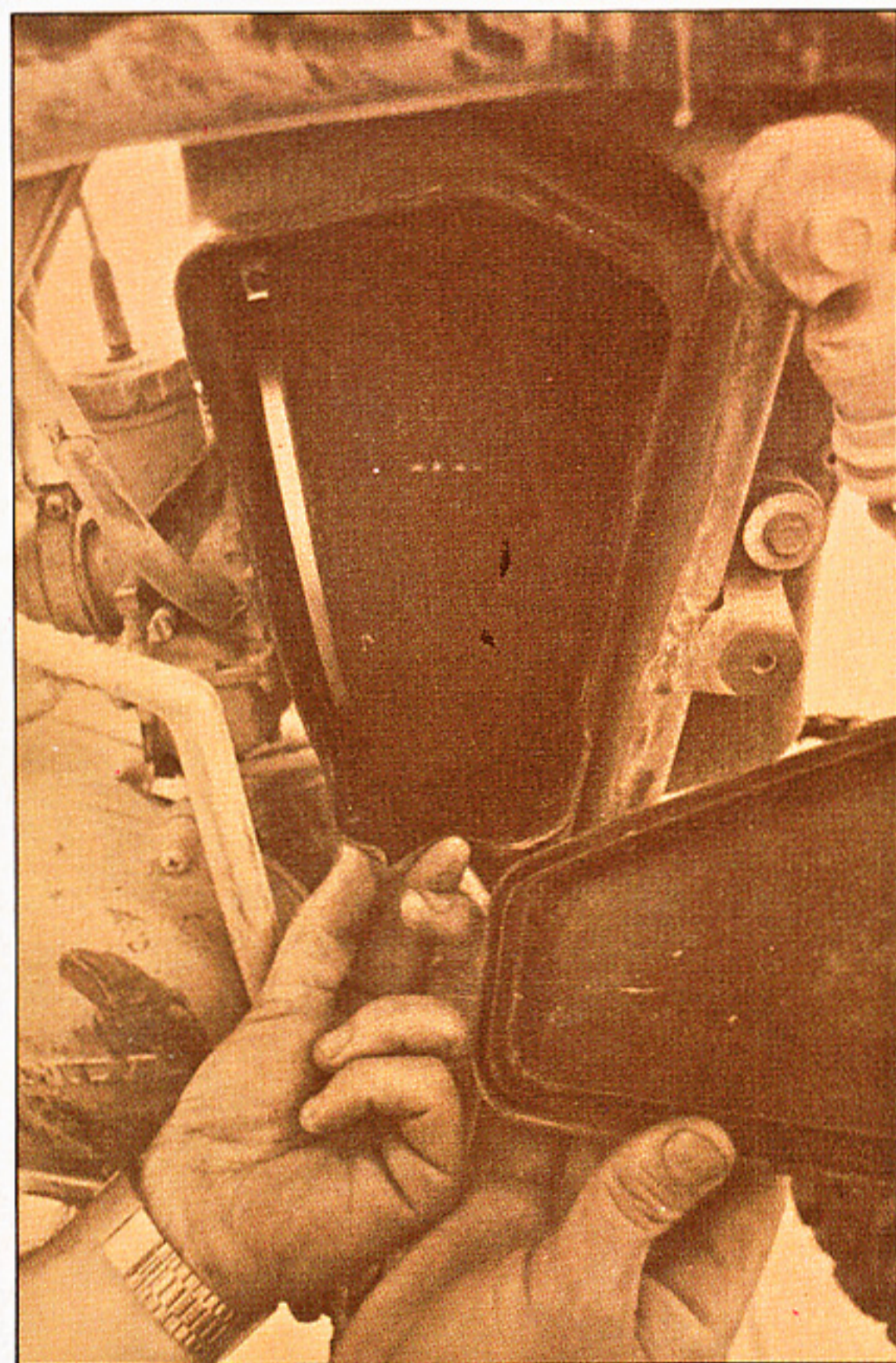
250R

Isn't Elsinore a retirement community?

Honda CR250R



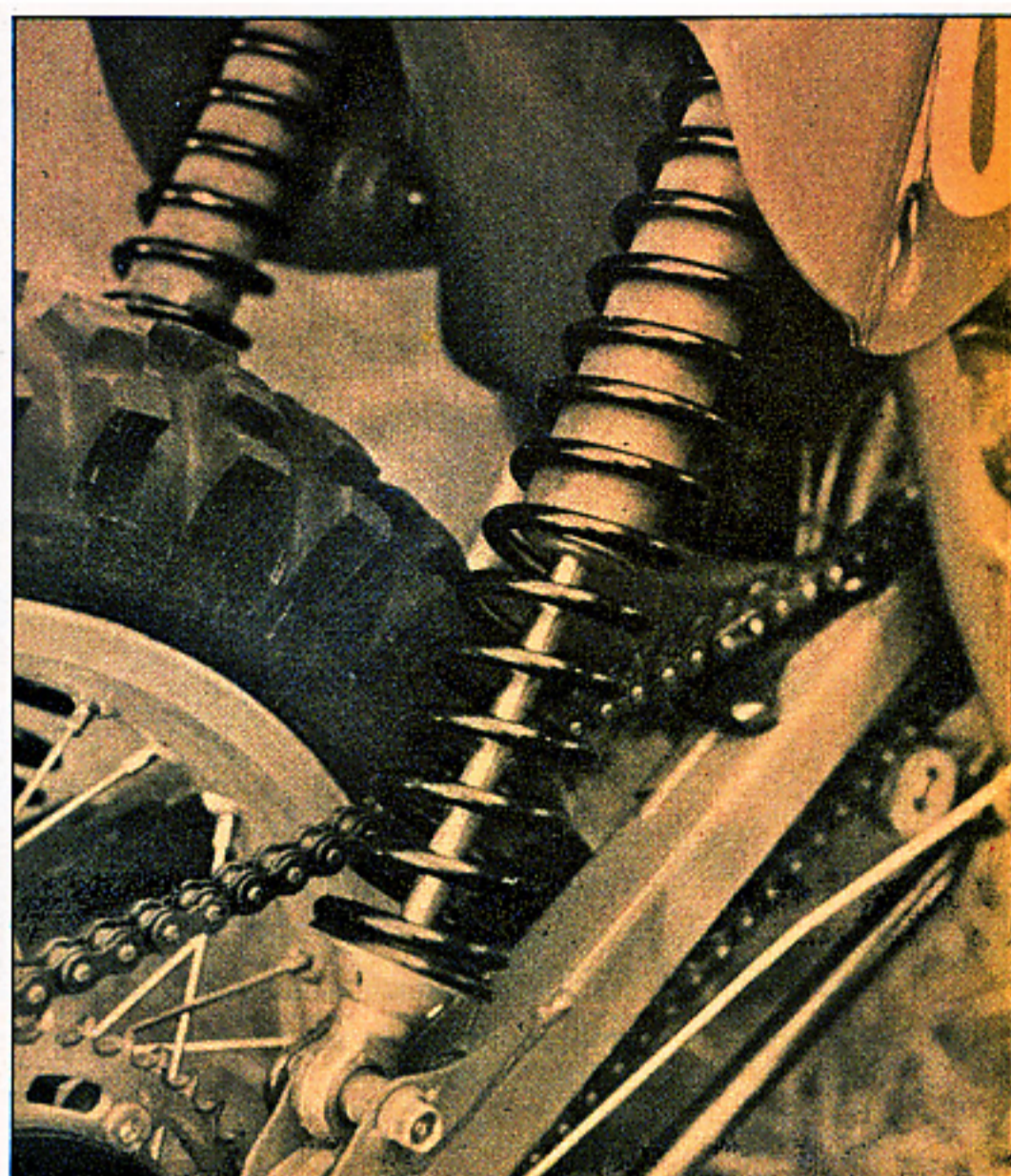
By loosening the three bolts on the mag cover you can externally alter the timing. It isn't that simple, though. There is a locking pin behind the tab on the left.



The plastic cover on the air box must be taped on. Otherwise it falls off. The plastic is cheesy.



The 5.00 Dunlop works best in tacky terrain; while on hard surfaces it needs to be run with less air.



The shocks have been the subject of most of the complaints about the CR250R. They are decent, but not great.



It is tall, but it will slide. It gets an unhinged feeling and feels like a runaway train, but with the gas on you'll make it through.

course today. Winning the categories of speed, light weight, material, price and suspension doesn't mean much unless you can win every one of them with the same bike. The Honda CR250R may not win every category, but it comes in close to the top of each one, and is never way out of the running in any individual honor, like most of its competition.

THE MACHINERY

The Honda CR250R is totally red with the exception of the seat, pipe, bars, carb and fork boots. The frame is Japanese chrome moly and is a sturdy and rigid piece of metal sculpture. The swingarm is long, and rides on roller bearings. The distance from the swingarm pivot to the countershaft sprocket is short enough that Honda elected only to go with chain guides and rollers instead of the industry standard chain tensioner. The chain itself is a good 520 D.I.D, and in a contradiction, by Japanese terms, is run off the right side of the engine.

The front suspension has 11.5 inches of travel (they claim 11.9 inches), and has an innovative cartridge-type damper inside the sliders. The tubes are strong, well-made and have enough tube/slider overlap to maintain the minimum level of flex-free travel. The rear suspension is made by Showa. The 17½-inch shocks are gas-charged, but lack any fancy reservoirs or fins. Travel at the rear was 11 inches on our machine. The shocks have accessory springs available for them in both heavier and lighter rates.

The engine is red. Behind the red facade is a carefully designed set of gears, levers and bearings wrapped in a set of aluminum cases that looks like it was vacuum-formed to the internals. The cylinder and head are interesting for several reasons. The head is a *true* radial. The total finning is generated from the area of the combustion dome. There are no useless fins mounted outboard on the head. The aluminum alloy cylinder has a hard chrome liner, instead of the conventional steel sleeve, which is light and dissipates heat better. The interesting part of the porting is that behind the six-petal reed there are two auxiliary ports that feed the transfer ports directly. This allows Honda to use a larger, more full-skirted piston without losing precious charge time to the bottom end.

The carburetor is a 36mm Keihin that feeds the 70mm bore and 64mm stroke engine. The piston has two rings. The larger bore than stroke tells you a lot about the characteristics of the power. The engine weighs 56 pounds when sitting on the work bench, but the bike will hit the track with gas in it right at 230 pounds.

TO THE LINE

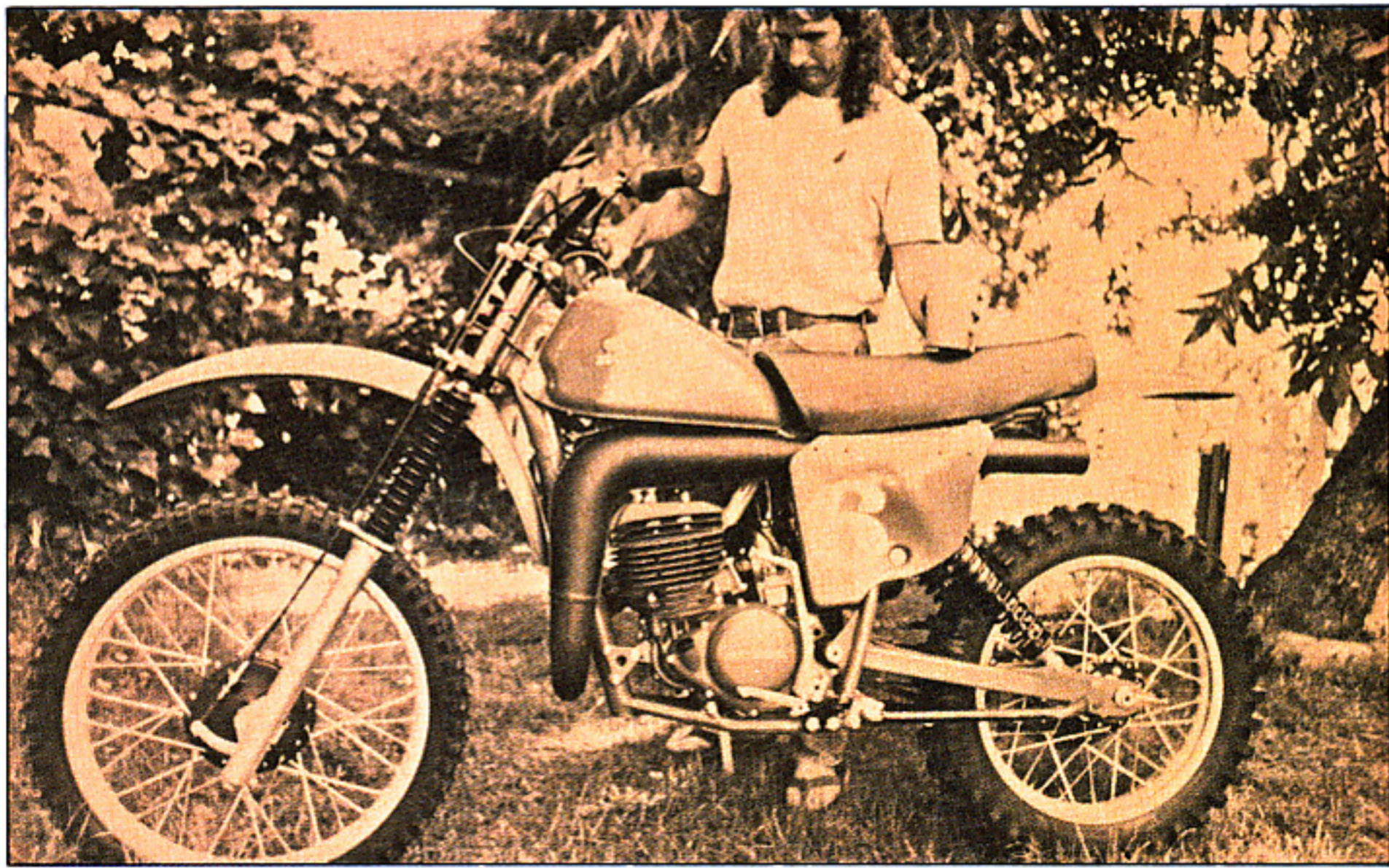
The seat height is 37 inches, and the bike looks and feels tall. When it is brand spanking new there is not much sag in either end and your feet dangle above the ground. Later on the suspenders take some horrendous sags and it is just like sitting on your old short-legged scoot. The bars are too wide, but they are sano chrome moly. The throttle is quick and slick. The levers aren't so great. The warm setup is to have power-bends, but they do have dust covers. Down by your feet things aren't so groovy. The brake pedal is not adjustable for height. Tall riders with gunboats for boots hated the brake pedal. Smaller tootsies were satisfied. The pedal is forged aluminum, which is high-society, but should be made amendable to the obvious differences in both feet and boots that abound in America. The shift lever sticks out on its lightweight hollow shift shaft and required some careful placement to get good shifts. The shift lever is prone to damage in its current location, especially with its stiff aluminum forged frame.

Bringing the engine to life means finding the kickstarter. It is on the wrong side, based on previous Oriental machines, but Husky owners will love it. It works better than the Swedish left-side kickstarter, too. Choke the Keihin and kick the devil over. It fires with a cold-hearted murmur and then begins stroking nicely.

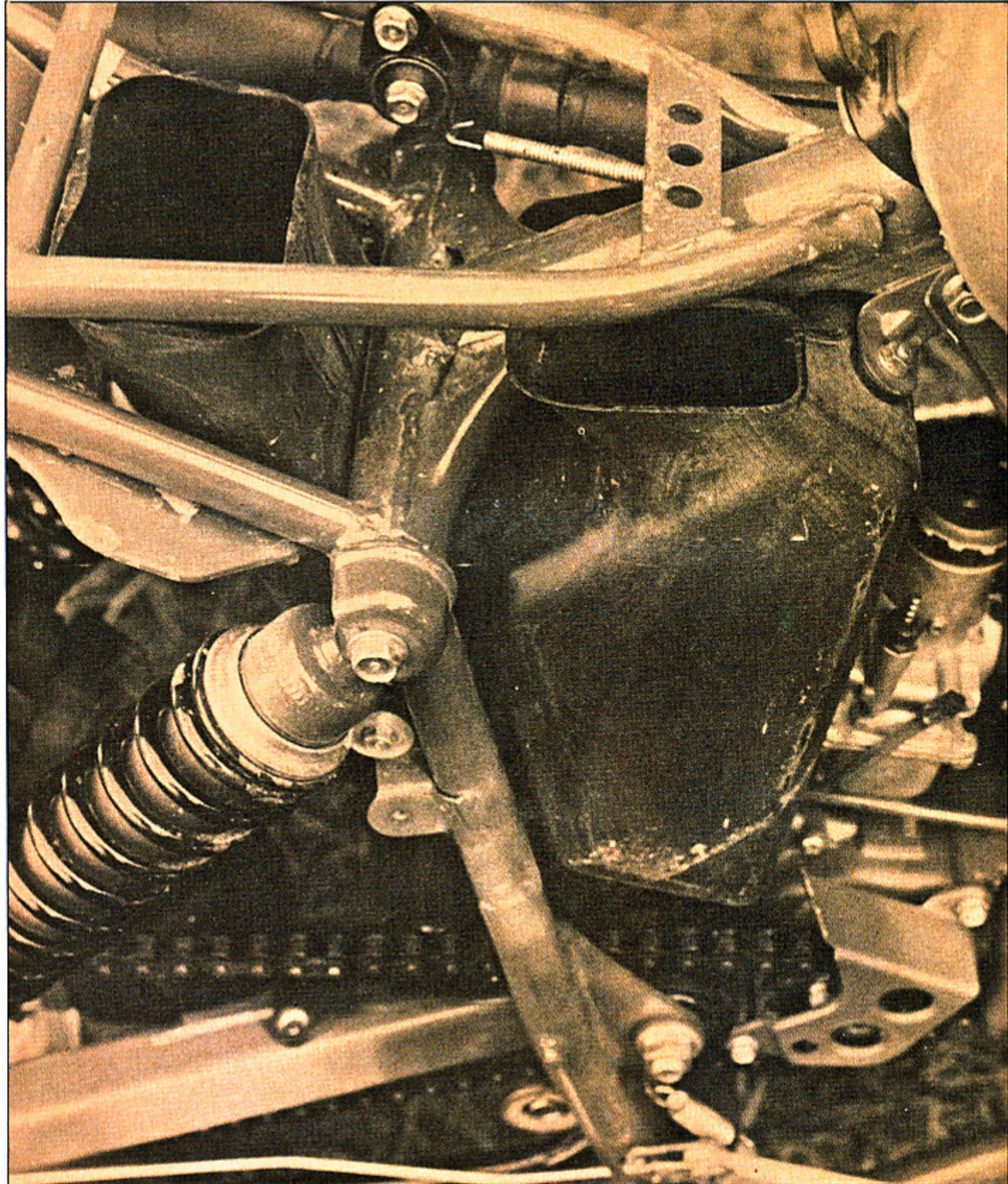
It shifts like an old Honda CR250. The lever throw is not too far, but the movement is indecisive. The tranny doesn't give off any clues as to whether you got the gear or not. This would be great if you got every one, but the Honda does miss an occasional gear. The shifting is mysterious, but 95-percent effective. We'd rate it with a Yamaha gearbox (not top of the line). The ratios are right-on, though.

The engine is snappy and runs on the high side of the rpm band, due in part to the over-square bore and stroke. The

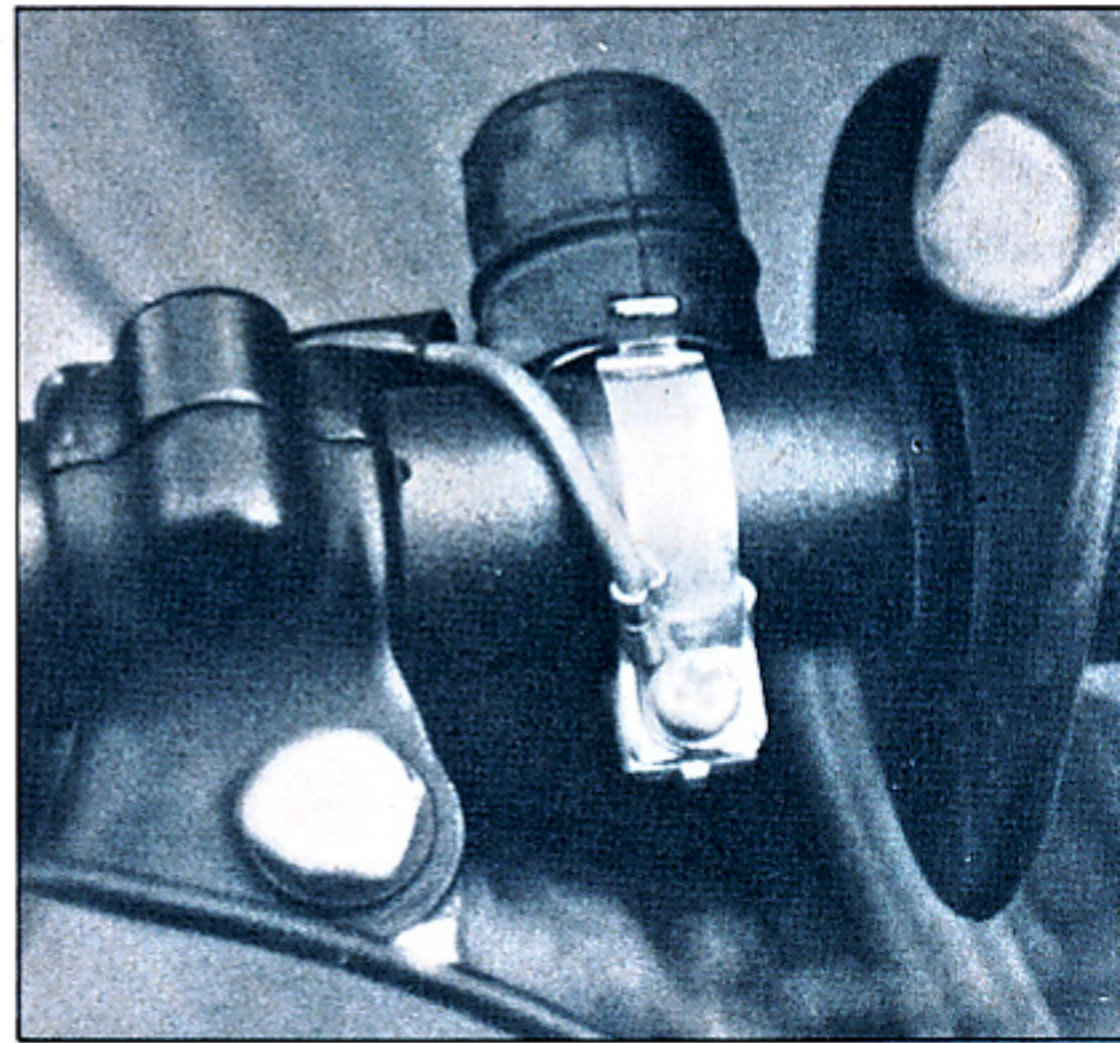
Honda CR250R



The only way to live: resting in the shade, drinking a tall, cool one and beaming over your new Honda.



The air box is an excellent concept, but the actual construction was done by a mad scientist. Too much trouble.



Confidence building or plain dumb? This flight of fancy might have ended inside the biggest cactus patch you ever saw. It didn't.



The handgrips are good. The special slot to wire them on is super-sanitary.



power is so good. If you interviewed a hundred Honda CR250R owners, the key word about the band would be that it is *crisp*. If you aren't cooking down the track the ponies just lie there, and you know who's at fault. The bike demands to be ridden power-on; it makes lovely cracking snaps and dirt flies off the rear wheel like a machine gun. A Suzuki or Yamaha will pull it out of a lazy, slow corner and a Can-Am will rat-a-tat-tat it down the straight, but nothing will stay with it from the middle on up. The bike isn't pipey in the dynamometer sense of the word, but in practical application, when you are doing it right, really right, the margin for error is slim.

The suspension will forgive you most of your transgressions beyond common sense. The forks are first-rate. The travel is long and supple. After you have had the bike for two weeks or so the forks will go soft on you. The sag can get as much as two inches. Honda has heavier fork springs available. Buy 'em and use them. The forks don't use air and we think that Honda should offer at least six different spring rates to its customers to ensure the proper rate for every rider and application. Everybody said the rear shocks were junk, and every Honda at the track was running Fox Airshox. The Fox shocks sell for \$290 and are the ultimate setup. Even the Honda team uses them. We don't think that you need them, unless you can't bear the weight in your wallet, or

are approaching the quasar speeds of Marty Smith and company. Everybody also told us that the stock springs were way too stiff, and that the Honda accessory soft springs were the only ones that worked. Pure crap. The soft springs are so soft that a good, fast rider clanks metal over every jump. The stock shocks are not the perfect suspenders. They work on a par with the stock shocks found on a Suzuki, and better than the stuff on a Kawasaki. You'll change them and feel a lot of improvement, but be prudent. Try riding the shocks until they go south. Play with a couple of springs. Use the preload adjustment. At \$1495, the Honda CR250R is a great buy for the price. \$300 for shocks makes the bike retail for \$1795. It is still a great buy, but the stock shocks might suit your needs, style and budget better.

URNS AND FLIGHTS OF FANCY

The Honda handles. When it is new the Honda handles funny. It is tall and the power is abrupt, and for the inexperienced rider this translates into a lot of weaving and bobbing about the track. Another full-of-beans bunch of baloney is that this is an *Experts-only* bike. This is hogwash. If this is an Expert's bike, then what is a *Junior-only* bike — a Hodaka. Ride the good stuff and get better. The Honda handles funny when it is new because it is taller than you're used to, and the springs and



Putting numbers on these plates is best left to people with an artistic bent.

Honda CR250R

things haven't sagged and softened yet.

The weird 28½-degree steering angle makes the bike a turner once you begin to adjust to 11 inches of rocking action out of the fore and aft ends. If you come gingerly into the turns pawing at the ground 11 inches below you, the bike will do *stage* turns. Each turn will be done in about three stages, and your foot will be touching the ground. Ignore the height. Sit far forward, that's why they put that long seat on it. Drive the front end into the ground. Get your leg out by the front wheel and power out. If you're hesitant it will skate around the corner like a top-heavy water skier. The Honda is a race bike. Race it and it will reward you. If you just want to ride it, then go out and try to find someone who

is advertising a ride bike, instead of a race bike.

WHAT WE HATED

We liked the bike, as you can tell, but parts of it weren't to our liking. The air box is a jerry-rigged, bogus piece of plastic. To take the air cleaner out and clean it requires removing the side panel, then removing a plastic cover, then loosening the air boot, and finally taking off three bolts to get the filter out. Engineering like that belongs on Christmas toys and model airplane instructions. The air box is made out of inferior plastic that warps out of shape, and the plastic cover must be tightly duct-taped on (always).

The brake pedal was a pain because you couldn't adjust the height, plus it was held on by a backwards-pointing bolt with a cotter pin securing the arrangement. The cotter pin was directly in the path of debris and deflection which could rip it off and allow the brake pedal to back off. Rare, but possible.

We suggest that you don't throw caution to the wind in driving into corners until you throw the front tire to the wind. The Dunlop rear tire works good, but replace the front with a Metzeler. While you have the front end off, send the wheel out and have the front spokes replaced with stronger ones. If you don't, keep an eye on the front spokes constantly.

The rear swingarm weighs 9½ pounds. A conscientious weight-saving program could be started by finding an aluminum replacement that weighs less. Always weigh any replacements first. Sometimes that lightweight aluminum weighs more.

Remember the trick auxiliary ports that feed the transfer directly? Honda is rumored to be engaged, or to have been engaged, in legal actions by a well-known engine tuner for allegedly stealing his idea. Honda denies it and isn't paying royalties, but Kawasaki is.

The plastic parts could be improved in three ways. The rear fender breaks off the bike too easily and too often. It should be mounted more securely and the plastic formula should be upgraded a notch. The side panels are another nightmare to put three-digit numbers on, and some effort should be made to smooth them out. Finally, the red number plates look bitchen until you try to put numbers on them. Lots of racing organizations require specifically colored circles on the number plates. Honda should supply black or dark green circles to put MX numbers on. They should be forced to do it by hand like all the poor, frustrated racers out there who have to try to do it to those wavy plates themselves.

MESSAGE ON THE WALL

The Honda CR250R has struck the corporate offices of Yamaha, Kawasaki and Suzuki like a bolt out of the red. The real lightning will be felt in the sales department. If the Honda was ten pounds lighter and had an air box instead of a jigsaw puzzle, the *Other Three* would have been buried already. The price is right.



HONDA CR250 SPECIFICATIONS

SPECIFICATIONS

Make	Honda
Model	CR250R
Country of Manufacture	Japan
Retail Price	\$1495

ENGINE

Type	Single-cylinder, two-stroke, reed
Bore and Stroke	70mm x 64.4mm
Displacement	247cc
Compression Ratio	7.3:1
Carburetion	36mm Keihin
Ignition	CDI
Lubrication	Pre-mix
Air Filter	Oiled foam
Transmission	Five-speed

CHASSIS DIMENSIONS

Overall Length	84.5 inches
Overall Width	35 inches
Overall Height	46.5 inches
Wheelbase	56.9 inches
Ground Clearance	11.8 inches
Dry Weight	219 pounds

CAPACITIES

Fuel	2.2 gallons
Transmission	700cc

SUSPENSION

Front	Spring Showa, cartridge dampers (11.5 inches)
Rear	Gas Showa, spring (11 inches)