



CR

16

125R PRO-LINK

HONDA

SEGA

RACE TEST

HONDA CR125R

Tenth anniversary present

□ While most of today's hotshot 125 riders were playing with blocks and trying to spell *cat*, Honda set the motocross world on fire. Ten years ago rumors ran rampant in the close-knit MX pipeline about Honda's impending entrance into motocross. Today, that doesn't seem so odd, but in 1973 Honda was a four-stroke company. To race motocross meant building a two-stroke, and a two-stroke was blasphemy to the world of Honda. But ten years ago the CR125 Elsinore was released, fires were lit, and motocross hasn't been the same since.

That first CR125 was a brilliantly conceived, designed and engineered machine. Unlike anything available, it became the *only* bike to own if you hoped, or even dreamed, of winning a race. In the years that have passed, Honda's motocross fortunes have waned, withered and wandered off the true course set back in 1973. For a span of years (1976-78) Honda didn't even try to build a good 125. Nineteen seventy-nine saw the first reemergence of pride and effort, but it was a disaster. Nineteen eighty was a step forward, with a hard-running twin-shocker; but in 1981 when watercooling came in, Honda took a step back. The 1982 Honda CR125R was the best effort to date, but was overshadowed by YZ horsepower, Suzuki rear suspension and Kawasaki handling.

SO MUCH FOR THE HISTORY OF HONDA

The 1983 Honda CR125R is the best-handling 125 motocrosser ever built! It is as close to flawless as any rider would ever want. It turns, jumps, wheelies, sits and feels right—no, better than right; it has perfection scaled into its geometries. Heavy words, but the CR125R can live up to them. As a rolling chassis, no competitor could ask for more in a bike. It drives off the line straight and true, wheelies with delicate control, tracks through the rough with nary a wiggle, darts to the inside like a Stukka dive bomber, rails berms with unflinching accuracy, remains neutral in the air, absorbs little bumps without breaking stride, swallows frame-crushers in giant leaps, stops on a dime and gives change, has stock suspension components, is big enough to feel stable, is as light as a feather, and yet your feet can touch the ground on the starting line.

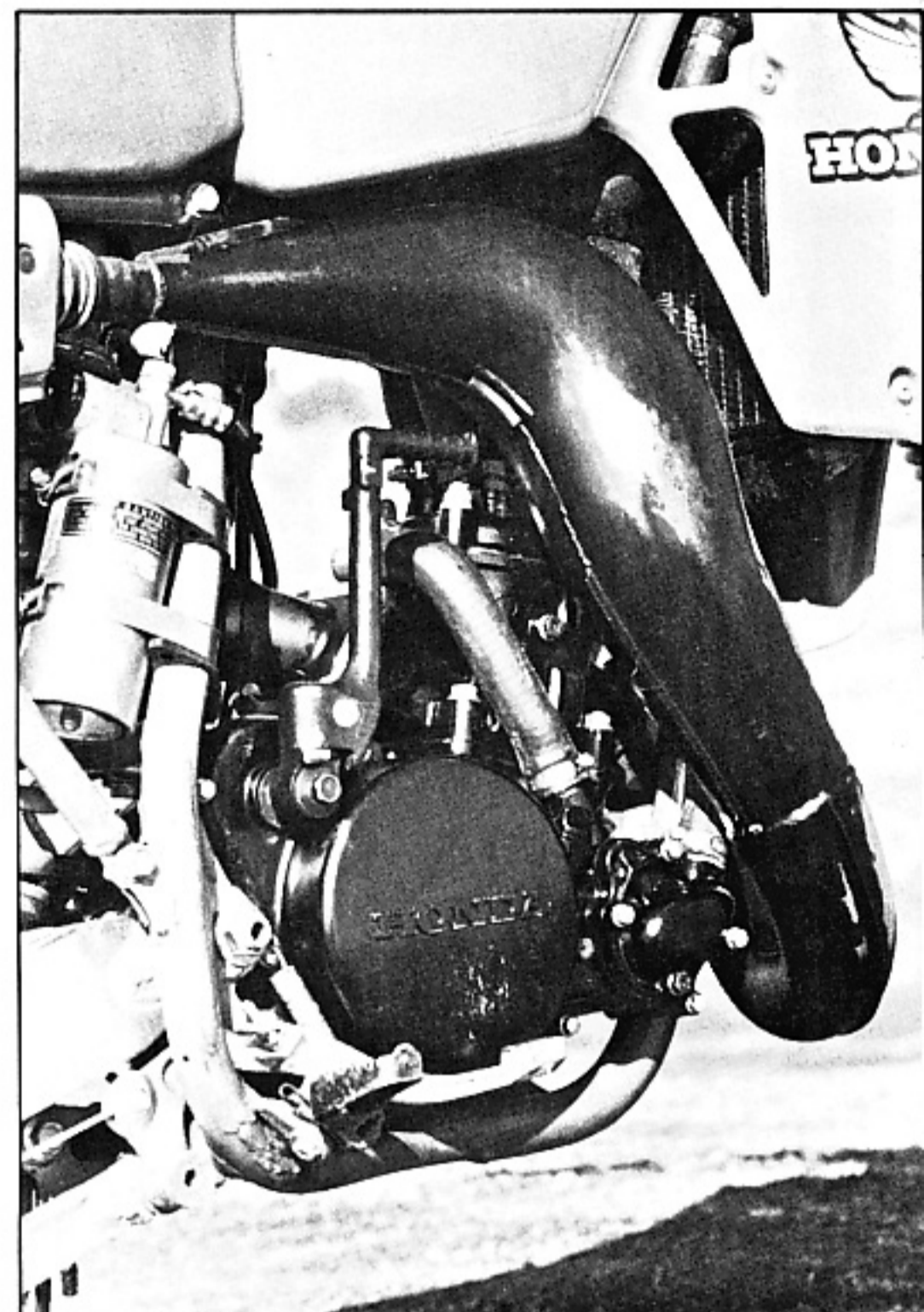


Smaller hubs are accompanied by a less effective brake area, but the pucker power of the stoppers hasn't been affected.

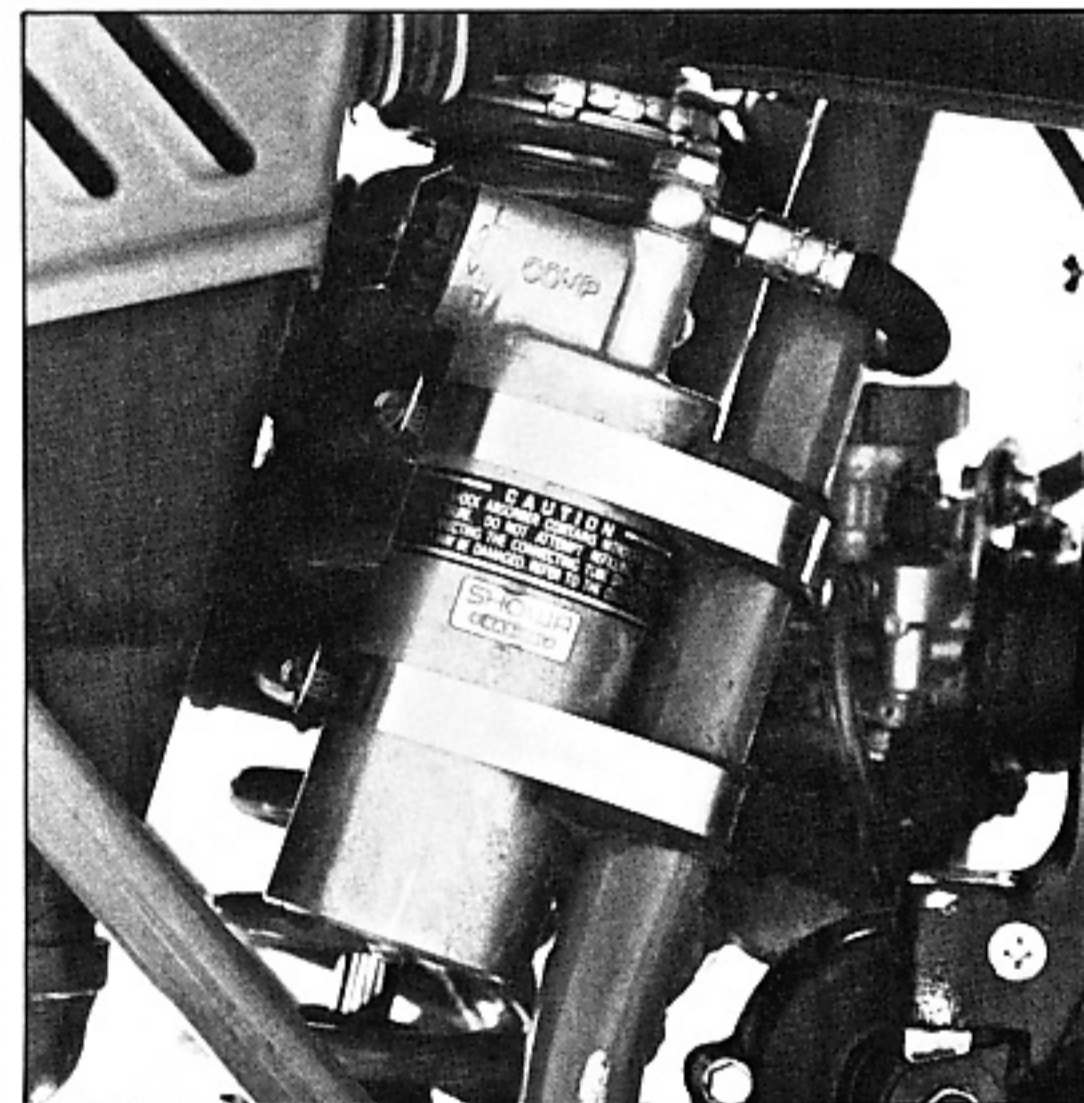
HONDA CR125R



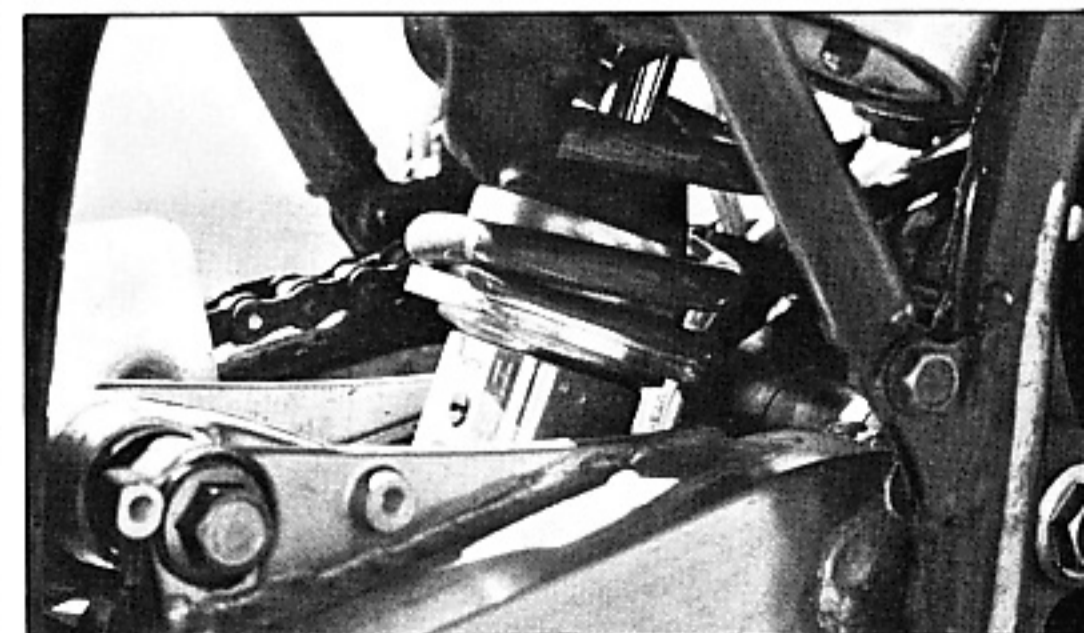
Light, airy and terminally perfect is the way the CR125R handles. It is forgiving and mind-expanding at the same time.



In five model years Honda has redesigned the CR125R motor. In 1983 they got it right.



Showa has been in the business a long time, but not successfully. If its new 1983 adjustable shock is any indicator, Showa has finally made the grade.



New linkage and improved leverage ratios make the rear end work well. Rebound damping can be adjusted with the turn of a screw.



Tastefully appointed, the Honda CR125R stands tall, but sits low. Ergometrics are first-rate.



Honda's mid-range powerband requires concentration, flow and a quick left toe.

WHAT'S SO DIFFERENT?

Everything is different between the 1982 CR and the 1983 model. From tires to hubs, suspension components to frame geometry, engine design to radiator position and back again, the 1983 Honda CR125R has been touched by a magic hand. The motocross good fairy built this bike.

Direct comparisons to last year reveal that the new bike is two inches lower in seat height, six pounds lighter (190 pounds), one half inch longer in the wheelbase, has smaller hubs with straight-pull spokes, more trail, less rake, lower radiators, removable rear frame, adjustable compression and rebound damping on the shock, adjustable compression damping on the forks, a safety seat, new plastic, larger clutch, left-side chain, new reed valves and a racier look.

HOW FAST IS IT?

Okay, you have us here. Although the bike is a dream to ride and the best-handling 125 ever built, it isn't blazing fast. But the good news is that it isn't slow. In head-to-head testing it is as fast as a 1983 YZ125K or RM125D. It would have been too much to hope for if the CR125R had handled like a smart bomb and had four more horses than the competition, so we'll settle for the fact that it is as fast as its competition and can

beat them in the rough.

Honda designed the CR125R as a mid-range motor, and there is no kidding about it being a mid-range mill. Making it work means that you short-shift and never rev the 122cc reed-valved motor. Carburetion is a 34mm Keihin, so, with bigger carbs and different timing, top end can be achieved; but if you get a handle on the brisk, quick-hitting mid-range, you can tap-dance the shift lever to fame and fortune (or at least a trophy).

We changed the stock 145 main jet to a 140, put the clip in the middle of the needle, and ran a 68 pilot. Most important for getting maximum performance out of the CR is to switch the rear sprocket to 53 teeth (stock is 51).

Riders getting off of Suzuki or Yamaha 125s will have to learn how to use the lower-revving motor, not by waiting for rpm, but by generating power through constant shifting. The Honda powerband is soft, but effective. It is more of a skill motor than a brute force powerplant.

WHAT ABOUT THE SUSPENDERS?

Believe us when we say that the 1983 Honda handles, and a big part of its charm is decent suspension. The Showa shock and Kayaba forks work. We were *shocked* too! Here is how we set up our bike. You can use

this as a base to work your own settings. Measure from the seat bolt to the rear axle with the bike fully extended, then sit on the seat and settle in. Measure the same seat-to-axle distance with your weight in the saddle. One hundred millimeters of sag is perfect; adjust the preload until you get it right. Set the rebound clicker on the shock body at one click in from full soft, and leave the compression damping adjustment (on the reservoir) on full soft. At these specs, the rear was spot-on for most 160-pound riders.

The 38mm front forks worked best for us with seven and a half weight oil (or an ATF equivalent fluid), measured 160mm from the top of the fork tubes, with the springs out and the legs fully collapsed. Our front fork compression damper was set three turns out from the stiffest position. That was all we did, and it worked beautifully.

SHOULD I BUY ONE?

It has been ten years since Honda shook the motocross world with the first CR125, and if the new 1983 CR125R is an anniversary present, it is one we gratefully accept. As an all-around package, the CR125R is hard to fault. It could run stronger, have more top end, or even come with a big-buck factory contract attached, but if this is all there is, it is more than enough. To ask for more would almost be cheating. □