ASSAULT WITH A FRIENDLY WEAPON

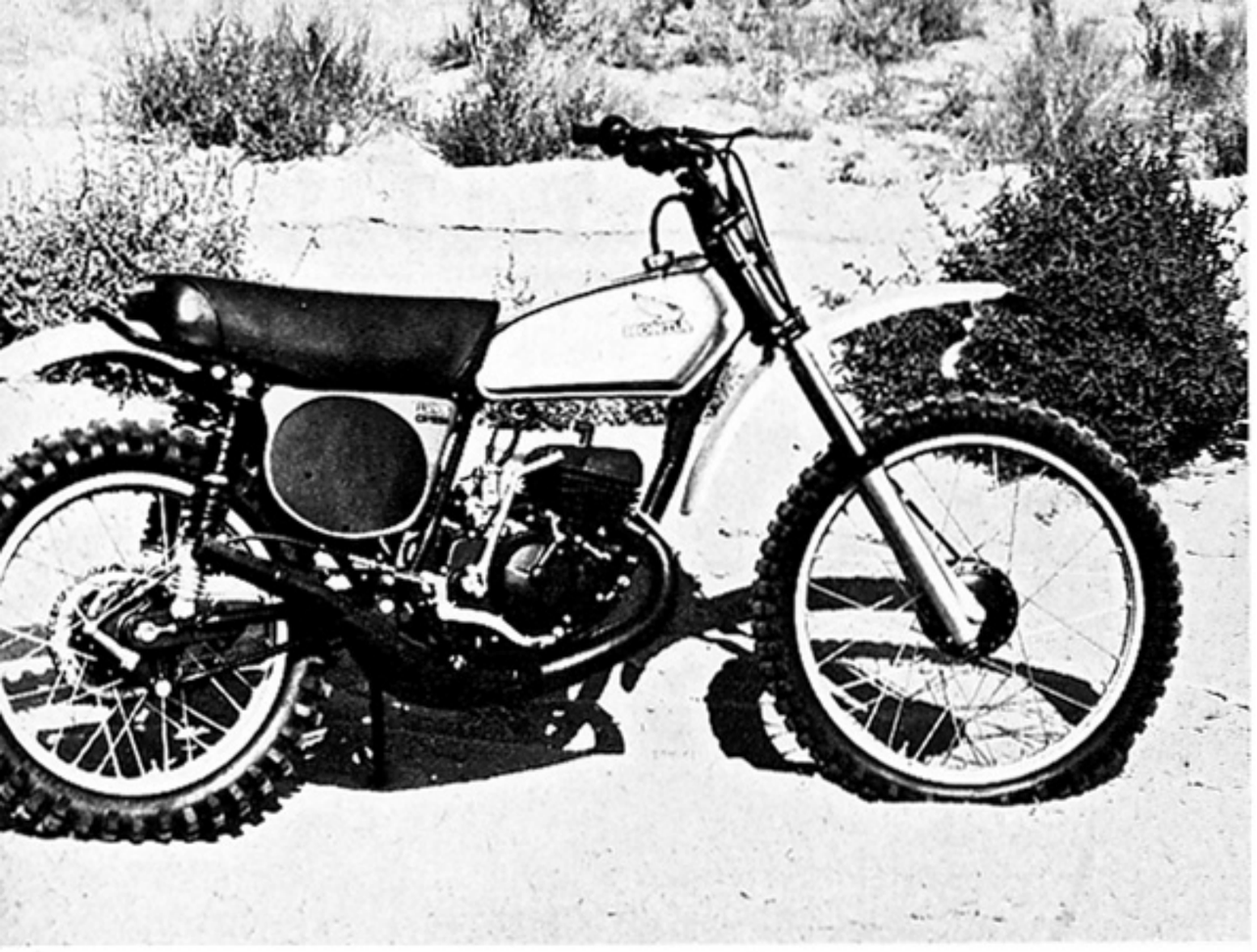
SMOOTHING OUT THE ROUGH SPOTS FOR '75

Honda's CR125 Elsinore

BY THE STAFF OF **MODERN CYCLE**

WHEN THE 125 ELSINORE nudged into the racing scene about a year-and-a-half ago, it caught the rest of the manufacturers with their pants around their ankles. Selling for a paltry $740, the junior Elsinore was clearly the finest bike in the 125 class. There was an instantaneous mad scramble for the CR 125s and many dealers artificially raised prices. We know of instances where people drove hundreds of miles to get an Elsinore and paid a hundred bucks more than the suggested retail to boot.

Aerial gymnastics were easy because of bike's light weight.



The reason it caught on so strongly was simple: it was fast, weighed around 180 pounds, handled well and came with all the trick goodies standard. Every other 125 for sale at that time weighed twenty pounds more and most of them were based on leftover "enduro" components. Lord! A six-speed gearbox, DID rims, spiffy-looking tank, good forks.

Problems were few, but serious. Stock swing arm bushings were trash and after a few hours of riding, the swing arm could be jiggled around by tugging on the rear wheel. The cure was ordering special brass bushings from Tom Sawyer Honda. He sold a zillion of them. If this precaution wasn't taken, the swing arm would flex, flop around and snap cleanly off. Or, if the rider was lucky, it would merely collapse and cave in gently.

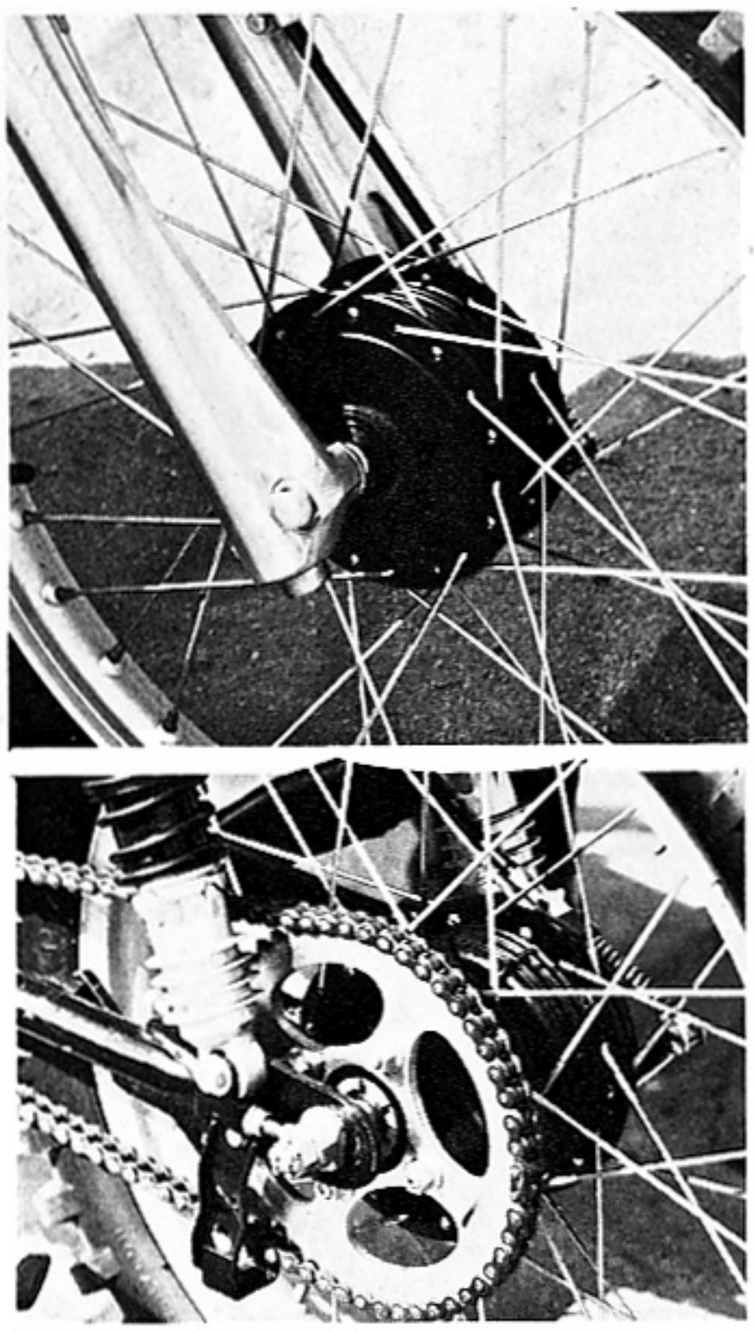
Footpegs were weak at the joint and the sprocket bolts were undersized. Still, the bike performed so well, that riders did the necessary fixems themselves and went racing. In 1974, the 125 Elsinore completely dominated small bore racing, not only on the pro level, but in Sportsman events. We can recall seeing races in which the first dozen bikes were 125 Hondas.

Visually, the new bike is changed very little. Paint has been applied here and there (splashes of red on the tank and side panels) and the bars are a slightly different shape and finished in black. Strangely, this Honda actually has the kill button where it's supposed to be: on the left side of the bars. This is a first for Honda. Why they don't do it on the rest of their bikes is beyond us.

Our machine started instantly the first time we rode it and stayed that way for the duration of the test. Immediately upon starting, however, we noticed the offensive exhaust note. It is easily the loudest and most irritating on any production bike. You meet the nicest people on a Honda is pure bullshit when they allow an ear-raper like this to be sold. It's even louder than last year's clamp-on-the-chamber silencer.

We were so surprised at the noise output, we tried one of Skyways new Hot Tip pipes. While the bike only put out another horse-and-a-half on the dyno, it was very quiet. Additionally, the trick pipe let the rpm build faster than the stock pipe. At $69.95, the Skyway pipe is the way to go.

As long as we're into modifications, here's the stuff we've found out that works best on the Honda. Webco head (keeps detonation and heat down), a 30mm Mikuni carb, stock barrel and piston, and either the stock pipe with a Skyway muffler, or the trick Skyway pipe. The addition of the Mikuni carb alone gives the bike much more response at lower rpms than any other single change. If you really want to get in it deep, check the article in last month's *Modern Cycle* for the big deal we did on reed valves for the Elsinore.



Small improvements for '75. Bigger sprocket bolts cure shearing problem of past. Chain guide is wimpy. Kickstand hangs out too far; needs grinding of tab to tuck in properly.

Ridden stock though, as we had our test machine, the bike was strong. Not much response was available below 5000 rpm and the engine had to be screamed—like all competitive 125s—to get the job done. Once howling, acceleration was crisp and sharp. This year, the Elsinore is a bit faster than last year's bike. Still, the power flattens out on top sooner than we feel it should.

Naturally, because it *is* a small popper, the gear box must be stomped upon with great regularity. Here, you'll find what must be considered the easiest shifting box in the business. Once the rider gets used to merely blipping the aluminum lever with a hint of a movement, he'll be able to work through the gears without even backing off the gas.

While our tires were new, we found them acceptable. But as soon as the corners got the teensiest bit rounded, they behaved like any other low quality Japanese knobby. That is, they became squirrelly and unpredictable. Having ridden Elsinores with good tires, we can vouch for the handling improvements of good rubber. Of special interest to Elsinore owners, will be the new 3.75x18 Metzeler. We feel this is the best tire to put on a strong racing 125cc machine.

In corners, the Honda has no real bad manners, and can be easily considered the finest handling Japanese motorcycle made—regardless of class. Either end can be made to bite or break loose, depending entirely on rider position and throttle control. Even at higher speeds on rough straights, the Honda tracks straight and true.

Suspension is a mixed bag of compromises. Forks are good enough to be left alone and the shocks work well for 15 minutes or so, then they get hot and the ass-end starts swinging around when exiting corners under power. The rear end is almost decent enough to *not warrant* a forward mount setup. Almost. You will want a good replacement shock, though, if you ride motos of any length.

This bike is clearly designed for motocross. Trail riding is out of the question and desert riding is a hassle with the close ratio, six-speed gear box. Still, it can be made to work at cross country. The Miller/Petty win of Baja proved that. But even they had to push up hills alongside the machine. That motor, by the way, had the modifications done to it that we mentioned earlier. See? It works.

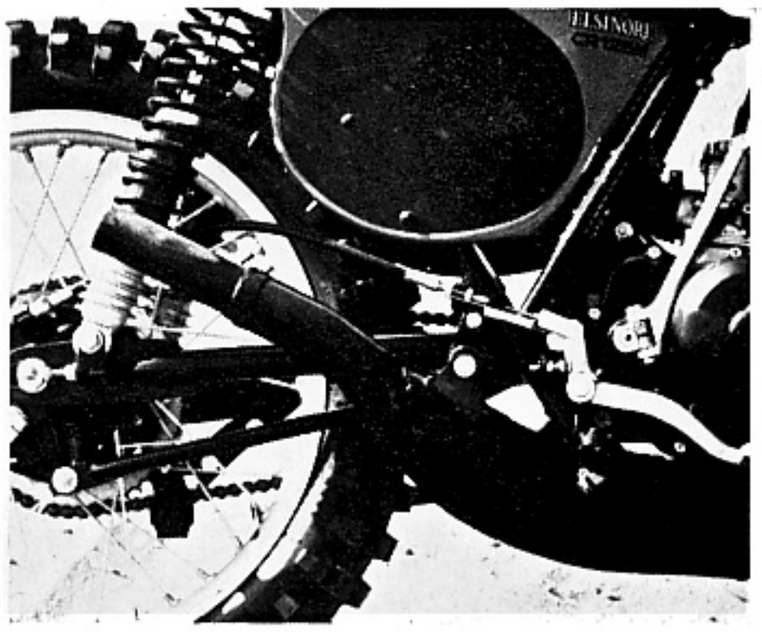
DETAILS, DETAILS

On the '74 125 Honda, there were a lot of problems with dumb little things like sprocket bolts coming loose, foot pegs bending, swing arm bushings failing, and the motor mounts coming loose. It seems that for 1975, Honda got their act together. According to Tom Sawyer Honda in Saugus, Honda went completely through the 125 and cured all of it's little problems. The size of the rear sprocket bolts was doubled and foot pegs were gusseted so they won't bend any longer.

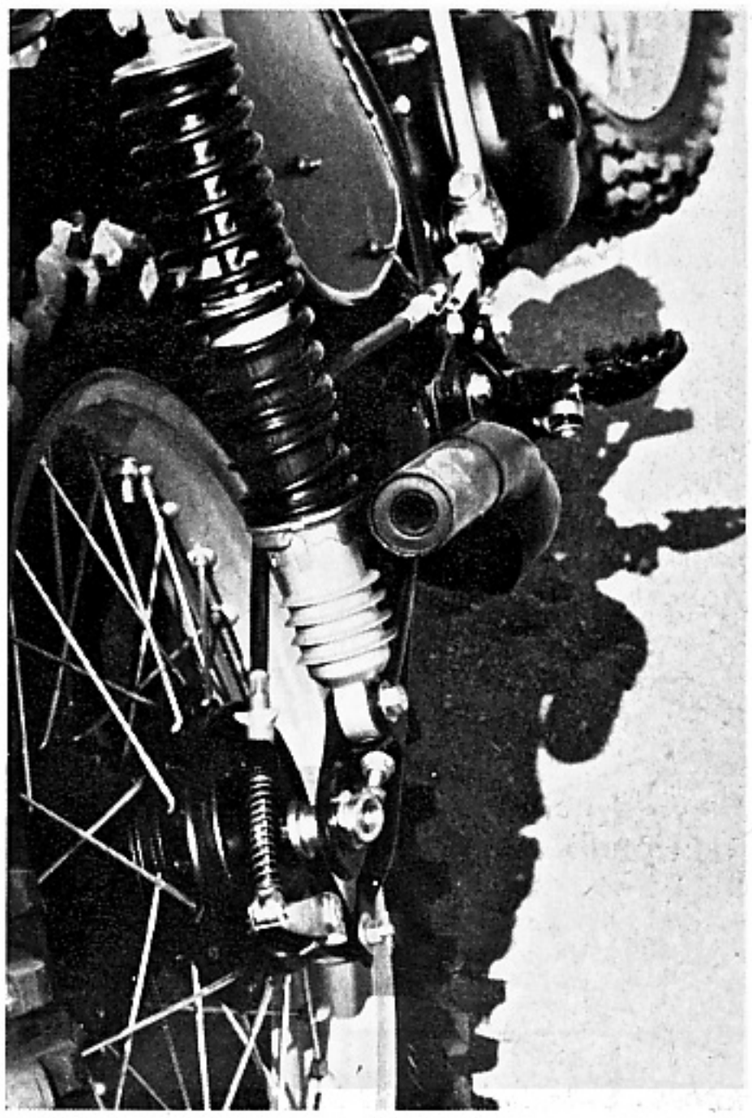
When Tom Sawyer sets up a bike for a racer, the procedure is very simple. Take the cylinder off, check the ports for rough edges, change the gear box oil, service air cleaner (which is a foam element this year) and a general check out. Sawyer claims that they have yet to break one of these new bikes. Their shop bike was, at one time, being raced three times a week by three different people. That means nine motos a week.

There are just a few things that you should do if you plan to race this bike seriously. Last year's 125 had the same shift lever as this one. It's got to be the world's strongest lever and it never bends. If you happen to be one of those who tend to fall down a lot a precautionary step must be taken. Drill a large hole through the shift lever at about the mid-point. When you fall, this is where the lever will break. Otherwise, the shift shaft will take the punishment and will probably bend. They recommend that when shifting, use the clutch. Constant abuse will cause the shift drum and the shift dogs to wear in a hurry. If you ride in water, take the seat off and seal the side panels to the air box with good old duct tape. As the bike gets age dated, the panels tend to lose their sealing strength.

After three races you should take the top end down and check end gap and piston clearance. All 125s turn so many rpms that they tend to wear rings faster than the big bores. While you have it apart, check that top end bearing. When you put it back together, be careful not to over tighten the head nuts, or you might strip the studs and warrant a heli-coil job. After you wear the stock chain out, a 428 Diamond should handle the job just fine. For running in this area, Sawyer says the standard jetting is real close, but that sort of thing changes with your location. On a few of the bikes that Sawyer preps for the racers, he raises the exhaust port a little. If you do this, you must mill the head to keep the compression at the same ratio. You probably should ride it the way it comes. It even hauled our fat-asses around with no problems at all. After each race you should change the



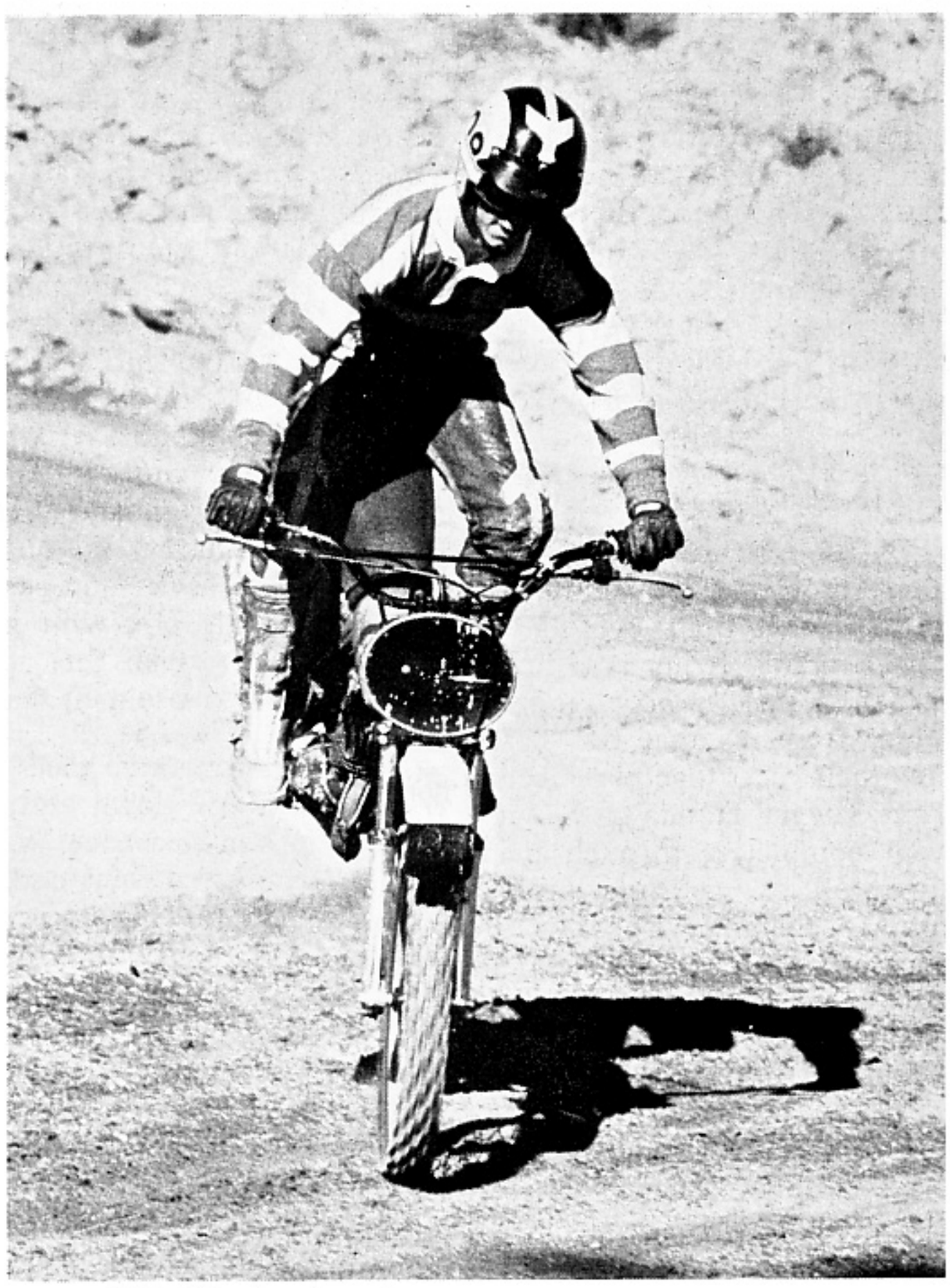
Standard pipe was horribly loud. Riders with big feet complained of rubbing heel against pipe when standing.



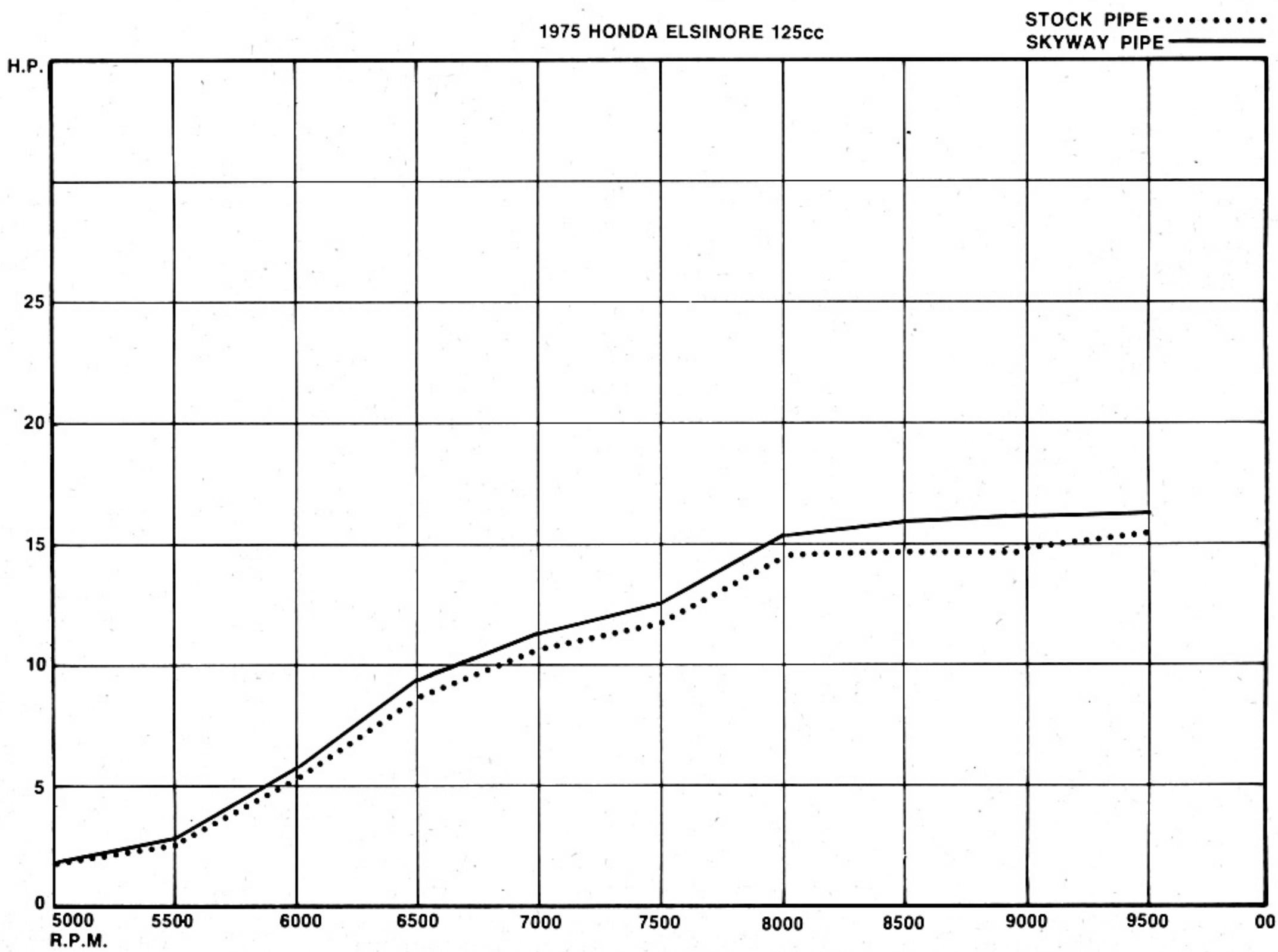
Everything is tucked in closely on right side. First time riders kept missing brake pedal.

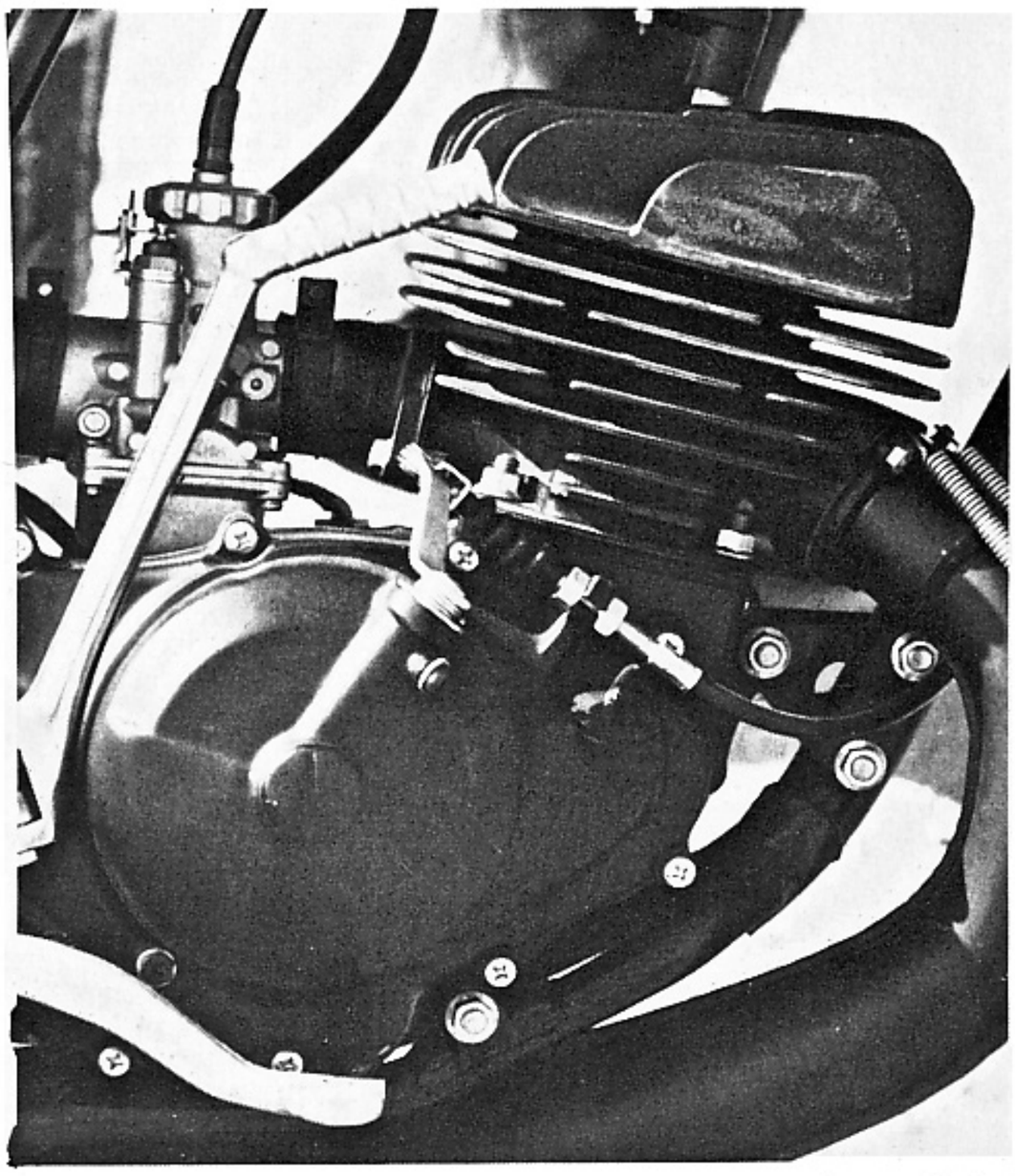
Mike Sixberry leans the 125 Elsinore over past the point of common sense and decency.

Billy Payne played games with the Honda . . .



. . . and the Honda played some games with Payne.



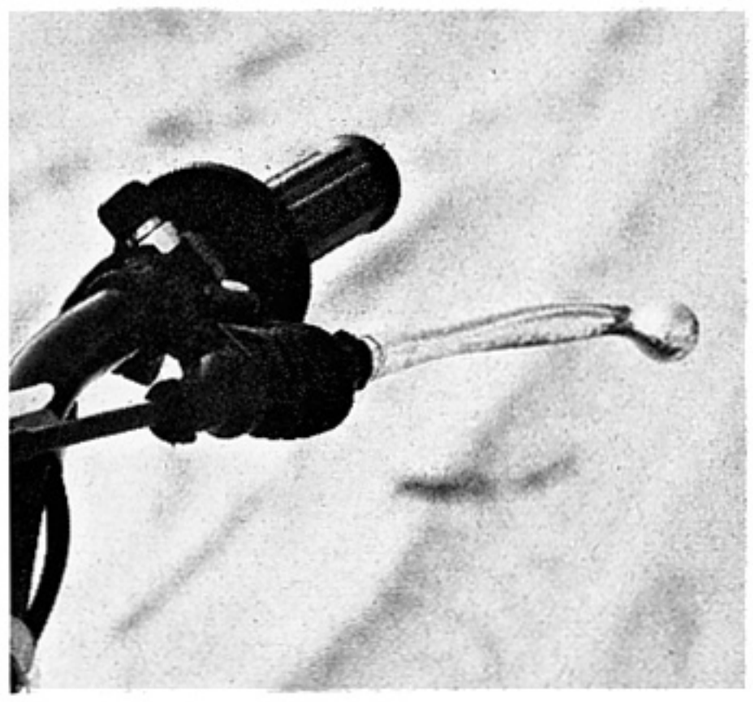


Engine is compact and ultra light.

oil; Sawyer recommends Castrol 20-50 or Torco MTF.

SUMMATION

All things considered, this machine must still be considered far ahead of everything else in the 125 class. The 125 Kawasaki has a dynamite motor, but the suspension is primitive. The Yamaha is quick, but doesn't handle so wonderful. The Suzuki is too much of a compromise, but is close. The Europeans don't have a bike that is as fast —and their efforts cost much, much more than the Elsinore. Yup . . . even with the increased price tag, the bike is still worth it. They fixed most of the hassles from the first stage design and only left the rider with one glaring error: that unforgiveable pipe. As it stands, the Elsinore is further ahead of its competition than any other bike in any other class. And it's not perfect. Next year, if Honda makes the number of improvements they made this year, they'll make a shambles of the 125 class. ●



Good detailing, like rubber covers and nylon ties, can be found all over the 125.

HONDA CR 125

Name and model	CR 125 Elsinore
Price, suggested retail (approx.)	$889.95
Motor	Single cylinder, air cooled, piston port, two-stroke
Bore/stroke	56mm/50mm
Displacement (cc)	123cc
Compression ratio	7.6:1
Brake horsepower (sae) or (din)	19.7 at 8000 rpm claimed. Actual 17 at 9500 at rear wheel
Carburetion	Kehin 29mm
Recommended standard jetting from factory:	
Main jet	128
Needle jet	3.5 slide set—fixed needle jet
Pilot (low speed jet)	50
Needle position	3 rd.
Idle air screw (number of turns)	1.25-1.75
Ignition	CDI button mag.
Recommended spark plug	B9ev NGK
Specified timing and spark plug gap	1.5mm BTDC, .015 gap
Primary drive	Gear set
Final drive	428 chain
Gear ratios:	
1.	2.133:1
2.	1.611:1
3.	1.300:1
4.	1.090:1
5.	0.958:1
6.	0.880:1
Air filtration system	Foam air filter/Honda
Lubrication	Gas/oil mix
Recommended oil and ratio of mix	Castrol R 20:1
Fuel tank capacity	1.6 gallon
Oil tank capacity (if any)	None
Recommended gasoline (factory)	Premium
Frame (type)	Chromoly tube
Wheelbase	53.7 inches
Steering head angle	59 degrees
Trail	5.5 inches
Ground clearance	7.7 inches
Seat height	32.3 inches
Front suspension	Telescopic fork 7.1 inches travel
Rear suspension	Swing arm/Honda shocks conventional angle
Wheels:	
Front	21-inch DID
Rear	18-inch DID
Tires:	
Front	2.75-21 Bridgestone
Rear	3.50-18 Bridegstone
Brakes/hubs:	
Front	Internal expanding/straight hub
Rear	Internal expanding/straight hub
Fuel tank material	Steel
Fender material	Flexible plastic
Instruments (if any)	None
Weight (actual)	Dry weight 184 pounds
Front wheel	83 pounds
Rear wheel	101 pounds
Exhaust system	Expansion chamber
Silencer/spark arrestor (if any)	Built in silencer—loud
Starter (kick, electric, location)	Kick start/right side
Primary start	Yes
Guarantee, if any	None
Intended purpose of bike (from mfg.)	Motocross
Country of manufacture	Japan